THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH:

Their History Explained to Children.

BEING A CONTINUATION OF 'LINES LEFT OUT.'

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'PEEP OF DAY,' &c.

'And ONE king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more *two* nations, neither shall they be divided into *two* kingdoms any more at all.'—EZEK. xxxvii. 22.

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MAP OF
CANAAN
Zidon
Damascus
R. Abana
R. Pharpar
Aphek
Dan
Tyre
Abdon
Hazor
Kedesh in Galilee
Ramah
Bethlehem
Jebusites
Mt Carmel
Gath-hepher
Mt Tabor
Mt Hermon
Megiddo
Jezreel
Jabez Gilead
Ramoth-gilead
Debir
Shunem
Dothan
HALF TRIBE OF MANASSEH
Penuel
Succoth
R. Jabbok
Mt Gilead
Shechem
Mt Ephraim
Tirzah
Tappuah
Shiloh
Joppa
Gezer
Luz or Bethel
Shittim
Bethabara
Jericho
Gilgal
BENJAMIN
Ekron
Ophrah
Kirjath-jearim
JERUSALEM
Ashdod
Beth Shemesh
Mt Nebo
Askelon
Gibeon
Bethlehem Ephratah
Beer
Lachish
Eglon
Adullam
R. Arnon
Hebron
Gaza
Debir
Mt Carmel
Rabbath Moab
Gerar
Beer-sheba
South Ramoth
Wilderness of Judah
Zoar
Zin
R. of Egypt
THE GREAT SEA
SALT SEA
SEA OF CHINNERETH
R. JORDAN
MOAB
PHILISTINES

PREFACE.

THIS little work is humbly offered to Mothers and Teachers.

It is not offered as a SUBSTITUTE for the Holy Scriptures, but as a HELP in teaching them to the ignorant and to the volatile.

The history of the Kings of Israel and Judah is complicated, owing to the contemporaneous double lines. By teaching these lines *separately* the difficulty is diminished. Constant reference to the list of kings and to the map at the beginning will make the history still clearer.

But were this book placed in the hands of a child, as an amusing book to read to himself, little benefit would result. Children must be TAUGHT, because they cannot teach themselves. They are always seeking for amusement and never for instruction.

A young person who would condescend to read

a child's book might find this compendium useful, and so might a sensible grown-up poor person, but not a child.

Much pains must be taken by a teacher who would instill this history into the minds of children. After reading to them a portion, it would be well to let them read those passages of Scripture whence that portion is taken. Doing this—would be considered wearisome—if required to be done *immediately* after this book had been read; but the *next day* the little hearers would be better disposed to read out of the Scripture the lesson of yesterday. After the reading of the Scripture they might consider it even a treat to hear more read to them out of the little book.

If any doubt the *use* of a simple preparation like this, let them make the attempt to teach children without offering any explanations or asking any questions. The attempt will be vain in most, if not *all*, instances. It is true an able teacher would not need such a help as this; but all teachers are not able, and many who are—would find a few hints prepared for their use,—a saving of time and fatigue.

When we consider the great value of the ROYAL RECORDS of the HOLY NATION, we must feel

that it is worth taking pains to impress them on youthful minds.

Where is the history to be compared with Israel's history? Of *this* alone — God is the Author; in *this* alone—facts are never misstated, motives misunderstood, or characters misrepresented.

Israel alone has for her *first* — and for her *last* King the Son of God. The *first* King of all Israel dwelt in the cloud between the cherubim, and the *last* is now seated on His Father's throne—waiting to take possession of His own.

The first King was ungratefully rejected.

The nation was made to feel her sin by the human kings who for more than five hundred years reigned over Israel. For their iniquities were those kings dethroned.

It is now twenty-five hundred years that the whole nation of Israel have been 'WITHOUT A KING.'—Hos. iii. 4. Once, indeed, during that period,—their true King appeared amongst them, but He was again rejected with the cry, 'We will have no king but Cæsar.'

It is *our* ineffaceable blot, as Englishmen, that we killed our king,—our human king,—Charles; and it is also the blot of France that she did the

same to her King Louis. But what is the blot of Israel in having killed her King who *was*,—who *is*,—her God ?

Blessed be His name; though He was dead—He is alive. He is the only heir to the *earthly* throne of David; for He alone can prove His descent from David. He is also the King appointed by His Father to the *heavenly* throne of all nations, in the declaration, 'Yet have I set My KING upon My holy hill of Zion.'

Surely the history of Israel (here familiarly related) must be placed above all histories. At the time when Israel's FIRST king manifested His glory in the wilderness, England, France, Rome, and Greece, had never been heard of; and when Israel's LAST King again comes with clouds to claim His throne, all other kings will fall down before Him, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

'Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.'—Isa. xxiv. 23.

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KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

KINGS OF ALL ISRAEL.

	Years before Christ.
SAUL . . .	1095
DAVID . . .	1055
SOLOMON . . .	1015

Years of Reign.	KINGS OF JUDAH.	Years before Christ.	KINGS OF ISRAEL.	Years of Reign.
17	REHOBOAM	975	JEROBOAM (set up the two calves)	22
3	ABIJAM			
41	ASA			
			NADAB (his son)	2
			BAASHA (killed Nadab)	24
			ELAH (his son)	2
			ZIMRI (killed Elah and burned himself)	1 week
			OMRI (built Samaria)	12
			AHAB (his son; married Jezebel)	22
25	JEHOSHAPHAT			
			AHAZIAH (his son)	2
			JEHORAM, or JORAM (his brother)	12
4*	JEHORAM or JORAM		JEHU (killed Jehoram, the last king of Ahab's family)	28
1	AHAZIAH (married Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah)			
6	ATHALIAH (his mother)			
			JEHOAHAZ (his son)	17
40	JOASH (son of Ahaziah)			

		JEROBOAM II. (his son)	41
		Eleven years of confusion.	11
52	UZZIAH	ZACHARIAH (last of Jehu's children)	6 months
		SHALLUM (killed Zachariah)	1 month
		MENAHEM (killed Shallum)	10
16	JOTHAM	PEKAHIAH (his son)	2
16	AHAZ	PEKAH (killed Pekahiah)	20
29	HEZEKIAH	HOSHEA (killed Pekah)	9
55	MANASSEH		
2	AMON	Israel was conquered by the Assyrians about 720 years before Christ.	
31	JOSIAH		
3 months	JEHOAHAZ, or SHALLUM (taken to Egypt)		
11	JEHOIAKIM (died on the way to Babylon)		
3 months	JEHOIACHIN, or CONIAH (lived most of his life in Babylon)		
11	ZEDEKIAH (carried blind to Babylon)		
	Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar nearly 600 years before Christ.		

* *Jehoram reigned four years with his father, besides these four years alone.*

The years in the two lines of kings agree, when summed up, and make about 250 *years from Rehoboam to Hezekiah, and from Jeroboam to Hoshea.*

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE KINGS OVER ALL THE LAND.

(1 Kings, xi. 1–13.)

There once lived a people upon earth who had God for their King.

This people were called 'The children of Israel.' God gave them the beautiful land of Canaan to live in, and He Himself was their King.

This people might always have been happy, but they worshipped idols.

One of the first of their idols was made of silver, by a wicked man named Micah.*

God punished the Israelites for worshipping idols, by letting their enemies come into their land and rob them, and ill-treat them. Yet when they cried unto God He heard them, and He sent good men, called Judges, to deliver them from their enemies.†

* This history is related in Judges, xvii., xviii. Those two chapters should be read after Judges, iii. 11.

† The writer of this book has published another on the Judges, called 'Lines Left out.'

Do you know the names of any of these Judges?

There was Ehud with his dagger, and Shamgar with his ox-goad:

There was Deborah, with her friend Barak:

There was Gideon, with his lamp, pitcher, and trumpet:

There was Jephthah, weeping over his daughter:

There was Samson, with his jaw-bone:

There was Eli, the aged priest; and Samuel, the little prophet.

This Samuel was the last of all the Judges, because when he was grown old the people of Israel wished to have a man for their king. They were grown tired of having God for their King, and wanted a man to rule over them.

God granted their foolish desire, and gave them Saul.

Was he a good king? Oh, no; he disobeyed God, and at last he killed himself.

And who was the next king? Was it Saul's son? No.

The next king was good David, the shepherd-boy, and the sweet singer of Israel.

When he died, who was king next?

His son Solomon, the wisest of men. He built the Temple, yet he lost his throne through worshipping idols.

He married seven hundred heathen wives. They turned away his heart from God, and persuaded him to worship idols.

God sent him a great punishment.

1 Kings, xi. 8.
Solomon and his wives worshipping idols.—P. 3.

God said He would take away PART of his kingdom and give it to one of his servants.

The kingdom was to be divided, and Solomon's SON was to have a part of it, and Solomon's SERVANT was to have the other part.

Why did God let Solomon's son have any part? Why did He not take away the *whole?*

The reason was, that God loved David so much that He was kind to Solomon for David's sake.

Another kind thing God did to Solomon. He said He would not take away *any* of his kingdom till after Solomon was dead. God promised that He would let Solomon be king as long as he lived. It would be Solomon's *son* that would lose part of the kingdom.

It was for David's sake that God let Solomon be king as long as he lived. Yet Solomon had great troubles in his old age. He found that it is a bitter thing to sin against the Lord, and he wrote down in one of his books, 'Fear God and keep His commandments' (Eccles. xii. 13). Yet we know that Solomon repented and found pardon, because God loved him, and never took away His mercy from him.*

* 2 Sam. vii. 15. 'But my mercy shall not depart away from him.'

CHAPTER II.

SOLOMON'S SERVANT.

(1 KINGS, xi. 26–37.)

WHO was the servant who was to be king over great part of the land? Solomon did not know, and the servant did not know who was to be king.

But you shall soon hear. Solomon had a great many servants. Some of them took care of his cattle, and some of them took care of his gardens, and some of them built walls and towers round Jerusalem. The builders were masons and carpenters. The masons hewed stones, and the carpenters shaped the trees into boards.

Solomon observed his servants while at work. Amongst them he saw one young man who seemed very industrious. This young man took much pains to build up every part of the wall that had been broken down.

Solomon was so much pleased with this young man that he made him overseer of the other builders. An overseer overlooks the other workmen, and tells them what to do.

What was the name of the new overseer?

It was Jeroboam.

His father Nebat was dead. His mother was a widow, named Zeruah. She must have been

pleased to see her son get on so well in this world.

To what tribe did this man belong? To the tribe of Ephraim. So we see he was descended from Joseph. Solomon placed him over the workmen of his own tribe.

Jeroboam was now a rich and great man, but he was not content. He wanted to be higher still. Sometimes he thought he should even like to be king.*

No one is happy who wishes to be great. The children of God are contented, and satisfied, and thankful; and so they are happy.

One day Jeroboam walked out of Jerusalem, having done his business for the day on the walls. He was alone. At last he came to a place where grass grew, but where there were no houses. He saw a man coming towards him. He was dressed in a new garment. When he met Jeroboam, the man stopped to speak to him. Who was this man?

He was a prophet named Ahijah. God had sent him to speak to Jeroboam. Ahijah took off his own new garment, and tore it up in twelve pieces.

How strange to tear up a *new* garment!

Ahijah counted out ten pieces, and gave them to Jeroboam, saying, 'Take these ten pieces, for

* 'Thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth.' 1 Kings, xi. 37.

thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and I will give ten tribes to thee.'

How much astonished Jeroboam must have been to hear he was to be king! He had often wished to be king, but now he saw he was really to be a king.

Ahijah did not give *all* the twelve pieces to Jeroboam; he kept back two pieces.

Ahijah told Jeroboam *why* God would take away the kingdom from Solomon. It was because he had worshipped idols.

He told Jeroboam another thing; it was that God would not take away the kingdom while Solomon was alive, but that He would do it when Solomon was dead. So Jeroboam knew he ought to wait to be king till Solomon was dead. But we shall see whether he did wait patiently.

CHAPTER III.

JEROBOAM'S REBELLION AGAINST SOLOMON.

(1 Kings, xi. 40.)

Why did Ahijah, the prophet, keep back two pieces of his new garment, and not give them to Jeroboam?

Ahijah told Jeroboam the reason.

God intended to let Solomon's son have two

tribes. Those tribes were to be Judah and Benjamin.* The other ten tribes were to be given to Jeroboam.

Let us consider what those ten tribes were that Jeroboam was to have.

Reuben, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulon.	These tribes were descended from Leah's sons.
Gad, Asher.	These tribes were descended from Leah's handmaid's sons.
Dan, Naphtali.	These tribes were descended from Rachel's handmaid's sons.

The tribe of Joseph was divided into two parts :—

Ephraim, Manasseh.	These tribes were descended from Rachel's son, Joseph.

The tribe of Levi was not counted among the rest, because they had no land of their own, but lived in forty-eight cities scattered over the land.

The ten tribes were to be the kingdom of Jeroboam.

The best tribe of all was Judah, where Jerusalem was built. That tribe was to belong to Solomon's son.

The tribe of Benjamin was close to Judah, and it was to belong to Solomon's son, as well as Judah.

* Sometimes these two tribes are called one tribe, because Judah was much larger than Benjamin.

Jeroboam thought a great deal about what Ahijah had said. He thought he should like to be king immediately. He was not content with being overseer of the workmen; he wanted to be king.

Soon Solomon heard that Jeroboam was trying to make himself king. He did not know that Jeroboam was the man that God had chosen to be king one day.

Solomon ordered his soldiers to kill Jeroboam. This was not wrong,* for Jeroboam was a rebel, and deserved to die. He was more wicked than most rebels, for he was very ungrateful, as it was Solomon who had made him overseer. But he forgot all this kindness, and wanted to sit on Solomon's throne. When he heard that soldiers were coming to kill him, he ran away to hide himself. Where did he run? He ran into Egypt.

There was a king named Shishak, who did not like Solomon. This Shishak was kind to all who rebelled against Solomon. He took the

* The words in 1 Kings, xi. 27, should be joined to verse 40, and should be read thus: 'And this was the cause that he lift up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father.' Even he lifted up his hand against the king.—Vers. 40: 'Solomon sought therefore to kill him'—that is, Solomon sought to kill him, because he lifted up his hand against him. All the words between form a parenthesis, and explain the CAUSE of Jeroboam lifting up his hand, even the prophecy of Ahijah, spoken secretly in the field.

part of Jeroboam, and let him live in Egypt, where Solomon could not seize him to punish him.

Jeroboam went on living there, till one day he heard the news, 'Solomon is dead.' Then he was glad, and he wished to go back to the land of Israel. But he waited till his friends in the land sent for him, and begged him to come back. He did not wait long, for his friends in the land of Israel soon sent for him.

CHAPTER IV.

JEROBOAM'S QUESTION TO REHOBOAM.

(1 KINGS, xii. 1–5.)

WHEN Solomon was dead, his son was king over the whole land.

His name was Rehoboam. Would you not expect him to be wise, as his father was so wise? But there are many wise fathers who have foolish sons; and Rehoboam was a foolish man, as you will see.

Do you know what is the highest sort of earthly wisdom? Is it knowing the names of many places, and trees, and stars? Oh, no! A very silly person might know a great deal. Is it knowing how to speak many languages, such as French, Latin, or German? Oh, no! Is it knowing how to do hard things, such as building

a ship, making a watch, or painting a picture? Oh, no!

Wisdom is knowing what is the best thing to do. *Heavenly* wisdom is shown in fearing God, and *earthly* wisdom is shown in knowing how to behave to everybody.

Rehoboam had no wisdom at all, as you will soon see.

At first the people of Israel were willing to have Rehoboam for their king. They came to a town in the middle of the land, to make him king. That town was Shechem.*

But some of the people did not like Rehoboam. What was their reason? They thought he would treat them as Solomon had done? Had not Solomon treated them well? He had done some things they did not like. Solomon had made them pay many taxes; for he had built such fine houses and such strong towers, and he had made such beautiful gardens and lakes, that he wanted a great deal of money. Also Solomon had been a strict king, and had punished thieves and murderers; and this was right. But some of the Israelites wanted to have a king that would let them do as they liked. These Israelites sent messengers to Egypt to ask Jeroboam to come to Shechem.

Was not Jeroboam pleased to be invited to come? Yes, he was. He came quietly to

* Shechem was called Sychar in our Saviour's days, and Jacob's well was there.

Shechem; and he told the Israelites what they ought to say to Rehoboam. So Jeroboam went with the people, and spoke to Rehoboam these words: 'Thy father made our yoke heavy; if thou wilt make it lighter, we will serve thee.'

What did Jeroboam mean by a yoke?

It is a heavy piece of wood put on the necks of oxen when they draw carts.

Jeroboam meant that Solomon had been a very severe, unkind king, and had made his people work too hard. Was this true? No, indeed. The people had never been so happy as in his days. Had not the Queen of Sheba cried out to Solomon, 'Happy are thy servants! Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice.'

This is what the Queen of Sheba had said; and yet now the people had grown discontented, and called Solomon unkind.*

When Rehoboam heard the people speak in this way, he did not know what answer to give. He ought to have said, 'I will be kind;' but he said, 'Go away for three days, and then come again to me.'

So the people departed for three days.

* Solomon had not made his *own* people do hard work, but he had made the heathen, who were left in the land, do the hard work. 'Upon all the people that were left of the Amorites did Solomon levy a tribute of bond-service, but of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen.' 1 Kings, ix. 21–23.

CHAPTER V.

REHOBOAM'S ANSWER TO JEROBOAM.

(1 KINGS, xii. 6–15.)

As soon as the people were gone away, Rehoboam asked his friends what they would advise him to answer.

First he asked the old men, who had been with his father. They were very wise, for they had heard Solomon say many wise things.

Rehoboam said to these grey-headed old men, 'How do you advise me to answer this people?'

They answered, 'If you speak good words to the people, they will be thy servants for ever.'

You see that the old men advised Rehoboam to promise to be kind.

If Rehoboam had been wise, he would have taken this good advice. But he was a foolish man: he did not like the old men's good advice; and he called the young men, who had been his playfellows when he was little. He said to them, 'What answer shall I give?'

The young men replied, 'Say to the people, "If my father made your yoke heavy, I will make it still heavier; if my father punished you with whips, I will punish you with scorpions."'

1 Kings, xii. 14.
'My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.'—P. 13.

Scorpions, you know, are little animals with a horrible poisonous sting in their tails.

The young men asked Rehoboam to give the people very cruel punishments, and to tell them so. They advised him to be as much more severe than Solomon as his little finger was thicker than his thighs (the upper part of his legs).

Whose advice did Rehoboam like best?

Wait and you shall hear.

When Jeroboam came again with the people to know the answer, Rehoboam replied, in a rough voice, 'My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it heavier. My father chastised you with whips; but I will chastise you with scorpions.'

How could Rehoboam make this foolish answer?

The Lord let him be so foolish that Rehoboam might lose his kingdom, and that Jeroboam might have it instead. The Lord had determined to take away most of the kingdom from Rehoboam, and to give it to Jeroboam.

CHAPTER VI.

REHOBOAM'S LOSS OF HIS THRONE.

(1 KINGS, xii. 16–20.)

WHEN Rehoboam had made his foolish answer, the people grew very angry. All the tribes,

except two, said they would not have him for their king.

Which were the two tribes who did *not* say that Jeroboam should be king? Those two tribes were Judah and Benjamin.

The people of the ten tribes cried out, 'We have nothing to do with David.' They meant that David was of the tribe of Judah; so they liked better having Jeroboam for their king, because he was of the tribe of Ephraim.

They would not have said this of Rehoboam had he not spoken so unkindly to them. Now they were glad of an excuse for not letting him be king. They cried out, 'To your tents, O Israel!' They wanted to go to war and fight against the tribe of Judah.

Rehoboam commanded one of his men to go and ask them to pay him taxes. The man's name was Adoram.

How foolish it was of Rehoboam to give this order at a time when the people were so discontented! It was just the way to make them more angry. Instead of paying money to the man, the people of Israel rose up in a rage and stoned him with stones till he died.

Then Rehoboam was frightened. He left Shechem, where he was, and went quickly back to Jerusalem.

And now the ten tribes made Jeroboam their king.

From this time Jeroboam was called King

of Israel, and Rehoboam was called King of Judah.

There were now two kingdoms and two kings. Which was the best kingdom to have?

The King of Israel had the greater part of the land; but the King of Judah had the better part, because he had Jerusalem, where the Temple was, where God was.

Jerusalem was the city of God, and the Temple was the house of God—the most glorious place in the whole world.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN CALVES.—JEROBOAM.

(1 KINGS, xii. 25 to end.)

JEROBOAM was now King of Israel. He would have liked to be king over the whole land, but God would not let him have Judah and Benjamin.

He would have liked to have Jerusalem for his chief city. As he could not have that blessed city, he built up Shechem in his own tribe of Ephraim, and he had his throne and his palace there.

But he was not happy in his new palace. He was afraid lest the people should change their minds, and turn him away from being king.

Jeroboam knew that the people ought to go up to Jerusalem to worship God three times a-year, but he did not like them to go even once.

He said in his heart, 'If this people go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord, perhaps their hearts will turn again unto their lord, even to Rehoboam; and then they will kill me, and have Rehoboam for their king.'

He thought of a very wicked plan to prevent the people going up to Jerusalem. He ordered two golden calves to be made: he placed one of these calves in a town at the top of the land called Dan; he placed the other calf in a town quite at the border of his part of the land, at the town of Bethel.

Then he said to the people in a very kind way, 'It is too far for you to go to Jerusalem. These calves are the gods that brought you up out of Egypt.'

The people were so wicked as to believe what their king said, and they came in crowds to worship the calves. At Bethel they saw their king offering incense to the calf.

He made himself a priest to his own idol.

And who were the other priests?

Not the Levites. They had left their cities in the ten tribes, and had come to live in the cities of Judah.*

* 2 Chron. xi. 14.

But Jeroboam did not want them to be his priests; he chose the vilest, the wickedest men, to be his priests; and he did not care of what tribe they were.*

He made a temple of his own at Shechem, and he had an altar there; and he made a feast of his own, instead of the feast of the Passover.

The towns of Dan and Bethel were now the most wicked places in the land.†

I do not wonder that Dan was a wicked place. Do you remember that five men from the tribe of Dan once went to look for a place to live in, and passed by the house of Micah? And do you remember how they came again and stole Micah's idols, and took them to the top of the land and built a city there? ‡ That city was called Dan.

Dan was a fit city for the golden calf; but Bethel was the place where Jacob once had the dream about the angels. How sad to think that an idol was placed where once the heavenly ladder was seen, and the voice of God was heard!

* 'He made him priests of the *lowest* of the people.' (1 Kings, xii. 31.) By the word '*lowest*' must be understood '*vilest*;' *not* the poorest, but the worst.

† The city of Dan was in the tribe of Naphtali, very far from the tribe of Dan. Bethel was in Benjamin. Jeroboam had no right to place it in that tribe, instead of in Ephraim.

‡ See Judges, xviii.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEROBOAM'S DRIED-UP ARM.

(1 KINGS, xiii. 1–8.)

You have heard how Jeroboam built a temple in Bethel.

One day he was standing before the altar of Bethel, burning incense.

Crowds of people came to the altar to worship the golden calf. Amongst them came a man unlike the rest: he came from Judah; he did not worship the calf; yet he went up to the altar and cried out, 'O altar! O altar!'

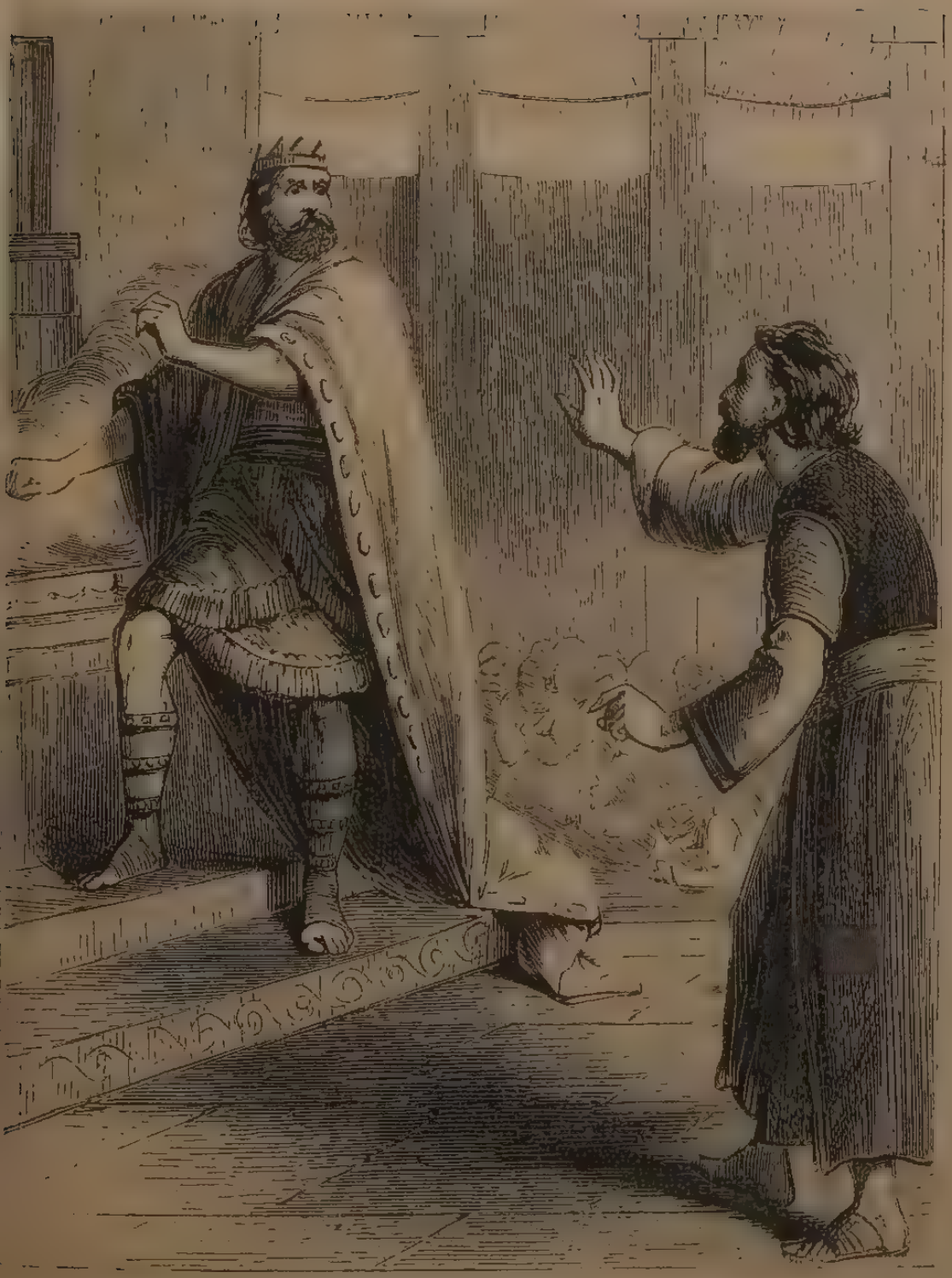
How strange it was to speak to the altar and not to speak to Jeroboam himself. All the people round must have been astonished to hear the man cry out, 'O altar! O altar!'

And what did he say to it?

He said, 'One day a child shall be born in David's family called Josiah, and that child shall offer up, upon *that* altar, the bones of the priests who burn incense upon thee.'

What must the priests have thought when they heard this!

But who could know whether the prophet was a true prophet?



1 Kings, xiii. 1.

And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel, and Jeroboam stood by the altar.' P. 18.

To show that he was a true prophet, he said he would give a sign : 'The altar shall be broken, and the ashes on it shall be poured out.'

While the prophet was speaking, Jeroboam grew so angry that he stretched out his arm to desire his servants to seize him, calling out, 'Lay hold on him!'

Immediately he tried to pull back his arm; but he could not, for it was dried up and stiff like a stick.

At the same moment the altar was broken and the ashes were poured out.

Here were two signs to show that the prophet was a true one, and sent from God.

What was the first thing Jeroboam did?

It was to ask the prophet to make his arm well. He said, 'Pray to the Lord thy God that my arm may be made well.'

You see Jeroboam did not pray for himself, for the true God was not *his* God. He said to the prophet, '*Thy* God.'

And would the prophet pray for him when he had stretched out his arm to tell his servants to seize him?

Oh, yes, he would pray for his enemy. He prayed for the king, and his arm was made well.

Then the king was so much pleased that he spoke kindly to the prophet, and said, 'Come home with me and take some food, and I will give thee a reward.'

Jeroboam was not sorry for his sins, though

he was pleased with the prophet for having prayed for him.

He had something very sad to think of. One day there would be a king of Judah, descended from David, who would punish the priests of the golden calf; but he would not be born for a long while. Yet God knew his name, for God knows the names of all who shall be born a thousand years to come.

Jeroboam would die a long while before Josiah was born, and all those wicked priests would die; but there would be other wicked priests, whose bones would be burned on that altar three hundred and fifty years to come.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET, IN THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM.

(1 Kings, xiii. 11–19.)

Did the prophet accept Jeroboam's invitation?

No, he did not; neither would he accept the reward that Jeroboam had promised.

This was the prophet's answer: 'If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee; neither will I eat bread or drink water in this place; for the Lord said to me, Eat no

bread, nor drink water, nor return home by the way that thou camest.'

Why did the Lord tell the prophet not to go back by the way that he came?

Because the place was so wicked that the people might have hid themselves behind trees or walls, and watched for him to kill him. So the prophet set out to go home by another way.

He had been obedient to all God's commands, and he must have felt happy as he went along. But he was hungry, and thirsty, and tired; and he soon sat down to rest himself under an oak-tree by the way-side.

If he had known what a great temptation was coming on him, surely he would have prayed under the tree.

What was the temptation?

You shall soon hear.

An old prophet lived at Bethel.

Was he a good prophet? Would a good man have lived in that wicked place?

I cannot tell whether he ever went to worship the golden calf; but this I know—his sons did.

That morning when Jeroboam's hand was dried up—these sons were near the altar. They saw and heard all, and when they came home they told all to their father. They told him of the two miracles, and they told him also how the man of God had refused to dine with the king.

When the old prophet heard this—it came into his mind to ask the young prophet to dine with

him. This was a very wicked thought, for the old man knew that God had forbidden the prophet to dine anywhere in Bethel.

He said to his sons,—

'Which way did the man of God go?'

When they had told him which way, he said,—

'Saddle the ass for me to ride.'

You see he had but one ass, or he would not have called it THE ASS.

The sons saddled the ass, and the old man rode on it. He went along hoping to overtake the prophet, and at last he found him sitting under an oak.

There the poor tired prophet was resting. How did the old prophet know him when he saw him? He could not be quite sure who he was, and so he said, 'Art thou the man of God who came from Judah?'

The prophet answered, 'I am.'

Then the old prophet spoke very kindly to him, and said, 'Come home with me and eat bread.'

The man of God replied, 'I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread with thee or drink water with thee in this place; for the Lord commanded me not.'

Then the old man answered, 'I am a prophet also, as thou art, and an angel spake unto *me*, by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'

Was not this story an awful lie? Surely this old prophet was a child of the devil, the old Liar.

But the prophet from Judah believed his words. How could he believe him? God could not change His word. No, the Lord always keeps to His word. He had told the prophet to go to no house in Bethel. Why then did the prophet think that God would not keep to what He said?

This is the way Satan has always deceived men since the day he said to Eve, 'Thou shalt not surely die.'

The young prophet went with the old one to his house at Bethel.

CHAPTER X.

THE OBEDIENT LION, IN THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM.

(1 KINGS, xiii. 23–32.)

THE two prophets were sitting at table in the house at Bethel, when something happened to make them sad.

The Lord spoke to one of them.

To which?

To the wicked old prophet. In the midst of the dinner, that old man cried out to the prophet

of Judah, 'Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast disobeyed the Lord and hast come back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in this place, thy dead body shall not be buried in the grave of thy fathers.'

Thus was this old prophet made to confess his own lies. What did the man of Judah feel when he found out he had been deceived?

He must have been filled with horror; yet he little knew how very *soon* he was to die for his sin.

When dinner was over, the old prophet desired the ass of the man of Judah to be saddled.

Perhaps this poor prophet thought he had a long journey to make, but he had not gone far before he saw a lion. The lion seized him, tore him to pieces, but did not eat him. After killing him, the lion stood by his dead body.

What a great wonder that was!

Here was another wonder. The ass did not run away, but stood quietly by the lion and the dead body of his master. And here was another wonder. The lion did not kill the ass, but stood near him without hurting him.

Soon some men passed by. These men were astonished to behold the two beasts standing by the dead body. They did not venture to go near them, but ran quickly to Bethel, and told every one what they had seen.

The people in the city did not know whose dead body was lying in the road; but when the old

prophet heard about the dead body, he cried out, 'It is the man of God, who was disobedient to the word of the Lord: therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him and slain him, as the Lord told him.'

Should you not have thought from this speech that this prophet was good? But he was a wicked old deceiver. He was a hypocrite pretending to be good. He spoke of the sin of the man of Judah; but he said nothing of his own far greater sin in tempting him and telling him lies.

No one was brave enough to go to the place where the lion stood except this bad old man. He knew the lion would not kill him, for he knew that God had sent the lion to kill the man of Judah, and no one else, not even the ass. So the old prophet said to his sons, 'Saddle the ass for me,' and they saddled it.

Then the prophet rode all alone to the spot, and found the dead body and the lion and the ass still standing by it.

He took it up and laid it upon the prophet's ass, and brought it to Bethel.

The lion never touched him all the time he was taking up the body.

The old prophet seemed to be much grieved for the man of Judah; and he laid his dead body in his own grave which he had prepared for himself.

He, with his sons, mourned over him, saying,

'Alas! my brother.' Yet he was no real brother to that good man. He said to his sons, 'When I am dead bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones, for what he said about the altar in Bethel will surely come to pass!'

Where was the grave of the old prophet? It was in a horrible place.

The altar of the golden calf was on a hill in Bethel, and all around lay the tombs of the priests; and very near them was the old prophet's grave. THERE was the man of Judah laid —all amongst the wicked people. An epitaph was written on his tomb with his name. People who looked at the tomb talked of what the man of Judah had prophesied against the altar. You will hear of this tomb again, when you hear about Josiah, who came to that place 350 years afterwards to fulfil the word of the Lord.

Those two prophets slept together in that tomb many hundreds of years: and even now their bones are mingled together.

But will they rise together?

Oh, no; the righteous prophet will rise to life everlasting; and the liar will rise to everlasting destruction in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, where all liars must be cast.

CHAPTER XI.

JEROBOAM'S GOOD CHILD.

(1 KINGS, xiii. 33, 34; xiv. 1–3.)

JEROBOAM heard of the death of the prophet of Judah, and of the three miracles that took place at the time: —

1. The lion not eating the prophet.
2. The lion not touching the ass.
3. The ass not running away from the lion.

Jeroboam had seen three miracles himself: —

1. The drying up of his arm.
2. The healing of his arm.
3. The breaking of the altar without hand.

Yet these six miracles did not make Jeroboam turn from his evil ways and serve the true God. He still went on worshipping the calves, till the Lord determined to destroy his whole family, though not *immediately*.

Jeroboam had wicked sons, as might be expected. If they had been good, God would not have punished them for their father's sins. It is

only when the children are wicked, like their father, that God punishes them.*

You will be surprised to hear that, even in this ungodly family, there was one child who loved God.

We are now going to hear about him.

Jeroboam did not always live at Bethel, though he went there very often to burn incense. He lived on a beautiful hill called Tirzah.† There he had a fine palace.

His little son Abijah fell dangerously ill.

His parents were alarmed lest he should die. What could they do? They could not pray to the true God, for they had forsaken Him.

Why did they not pray to their golden calves?

They did not feel that these calves could help them in this great trouble. They determined to send to a prophet.

Did they send to the old prophet of Bethel?

No, they could not trust him; but there was an old prophet that Jeroboam felt he could trust: it was the prophet who had once met him when

* It is written of Jeroboam's sons, in 2 Chron. xi. 14, 'For Jeroboam and his sons had cast them (the Levites) off from executing the priest's office.'

† Tirzah in the maps is placed in the tribe of Manasseh, just above Ephraim; but its real situation is not known, and many think it was very near Shechem in Ephraim. It must have been a beautiful place, as it is written in Solomon's Song, vi. 4, 'Thou art beautiful, my love, as Tirzah!' Very likely Solomon had a palace there.

he was returning from overseeing Solomon's workmen,—that prophet who tore up his own garment and gave him ten pieces. What he had said had all come true, and Jeroboam felt he could trust him. It was a long while ago since they had met in the field, and the prophet was now very old. His name was Ahijah.

Could Jeroboam go himself to see him?

No; he was ashamed to visit him. Perhaps he thought a good prophet would not answer him after all his wickedness. So he made up his mind to send his wife, the queen, to inquire of the prophet; and he told her to dress herself in such a manner that no one would know who she was: that is called disguising oneself.

Now Jeroboam felt the need of a true friend who could comfort him in his distress.

Happy are the people who have God to go to in all their troubles!

You shall hear now of the queen's sad visit.

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUEEN'S SECRET VISIT,

IN THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM.

(1 KINGS, xiv. 1–20.)

JEROBOAM wanted his wife to go and see the good prophet; he told her where she ought to go. The prophet lived at Shiloh, the place where old

Eli had lived about two hundred years ago. It was the place where the tabernacle had once rested, and where the glorious ark had been kept. But now the ark was on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, and the tabernacle had been taken away.

Shiloh was now a desolate, lonely place.

Jeroboam told his queen to take with her some presents for the prophet. He did not wish her to take grand presents to the prophet, such as a queen might bring; but he wished her to take little presents, such as poor people might bring, because he did not wish the prophet to find out who she was.

He said to his wife, 'Take with you ten loaves' (small loaves like rolls); 'take with you some cracknels, or cakes, and a bottle of honey.'

With these presents she set out from Tirzah to go to Shiloh. She must have ridden upon an ass, because she had to carry the presents, and to go a journey of fifteen miles, or more.

The old prophet Ahijah was very old, and he had grown blind, as old people often do. Yet as soon as the queen came near his house, when he could hear her steps, he cried out, 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam! why dost thou pretend to be another woman?'

How was it that the prophet knew who she was?

God had told him that the queen was coming

and He had told him also what to say to her. Ahijah did not say, 'O queen!' because she was pretending to be another woman; so he only said, 'Thou wife of Jeroboam!'

It was very wrong of her to try to deceive the prophet, though it was still worse of Jeroboam to command her.

The prophet knew what she was come to ask him about; but at first he did not tell her what she wished to know, but something she did not like to hear.

It was the dreadful message that God sent to her husband: 'Go, tell Jeroboam, I made thee king over Israel, and took away the kingdom from David's family; but thou hast not kept my commandments as David did, but hast gone and made thee images. Therefore I will bring evil upon Jeroboam's family, and I will take them away, as a man takes away a heap of filth, till it is all gone. None of Jeroboam's children shall be buried: those who die in the city shall dogs eat, and those who die in the country shall the birds of the air eat; for the Lord hath spoken it.'

What a terrible message! What must the queen have felt as she was hearing it?

At the last the old prophet spoke of her sick child. The queen was resting herself while the prophet was speaking. He said, 'Arise, and get thee to thine own house; and when thy feet shall enter the city the child shall die; and the people

of Israel shall mourn for him and bury him ; and he is the only one of Jeroboam's children who shall be buried, because there is something good in him towards the Lord God of Israel.'

Was it not wonderful that there should be something good in this child, though his parents had taught him nothing good? No one but God can put good into any one's heart, and God had put this good thing into the child's heart.

What was this good thing ?

It was the love of God.

How did the mother feel as she travelled home to Tirzah !

She must have felt very unhappy. She knew that she would not find her child alive.

As she put her foot upon the threshold of the door of the palace—the child died. If she had been a pious mother, it would have been a comfort to know he was gone to God, to be for ever with the Lord. But this queen was not pious.

The child was buried with honour, and he was mourned for by the people of Israel, as Ahijah the prophet had said.

CHAPTER XIII.

NADAB, THE SECOND KING OF ISRAEL, MURDERED AND NOT BURIED.

(1 KINGS, xv. 25–30.)

JEROBOAM was more wicked than any king who had reigned before him.

What kings had reigned before him?

Saul, David, and Solomon—kings of the whole of Israel—even of the twelve tribes.

Jeroboam was more wicked than the wicked Saul.

And why? Because he taught the people to worship the golden calves; he asked them to come and worship those idols.

It is true that Solomon worshipped idols in his old age; but he did not *ask* his people to worship idols; he worshipped them to please his wives, and that was very wicked; but he would have been more wicked had he asked his people to worship them.

So Jeroboam *made* Israel to sin. It was this which made God so very angry with him. Yet God let him reign over Israel twenty-two years. Then he died and was buried.

But how did he die?

An awful account is given of his death. 'The Lord *struck* him, and he died.' This shows how angry the Lord was with him, till he could bear him no longer.

When Jeroboam was dead, his son reigned in his stead. His name was Nadab. We know he was wicked, because *all* Jeroboam's sons were wicked (except that little one who died).

Nadab went on worshipping the golden calves, as his father had taught him.

Very soon he led out his people to war. He heard that the Philistines had taken away one of his cities: it was Gibbethon, in the tribe of Dan. The Philistines lived chiefly in that tribe, and they were always doing harm to the Israelites, as in the days of Samson.

When Nadab and his army arrived at Gibbethon, they laid siege to it. They surrounded the city, and tried to prevent anyone going in or out.

While they were doing this—a terrible event happened. There was a man called Baasha, belonging to the tribe of Issachar. This man wished to be king, and so he killed Nadab. We do not know *how* he killed him. There must have been many soldiers on his side, for as soon as Nadab was dead Baasha was made king.

Then Baasha began to do the horrible work of punishing Jeroboam's family for their crimes. He

killed all the children of Jeroboam, and all his grandchildren.

What was his reason for killing them? It was that none of them might reign, as they had a better right to be king than Baasha. But God's reason for letting Baasha kill them was because they all worshipped the golden calves that Jeroboam had made. If there had been any good one among them, God would have blessed that one, as He blessed the little Abijah.

Nadab's body lay unburied on the fields of Dan, where he had been fighting; and the vultures devoured it. It happened as Ahijah had told Nadab's mother,—none of the bodies of Jeroboam's family were buried: all were devoured by vultures or by dogs.

Nadab reigned only two years; so he died when he was young. He was not so wicked as Jeroboam, who first set up the golden calves. Yet he came to a worse end; for God does not punish sinners according to their wickedness in this life: some who are the most wicked are less punished than some who are the least wicked; but God will see hereafter that all are judged according to their evil deeds.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAASHA, THE THIRD KING OF ISRAEL, A MURDERER AND YET SPARED.

(1 KINGS, xv. 33, 34; xvi. 1–8.)

WHEN Baasha had killed Nadab, he became king. He went to Tirzah, and took possession of Nadab's palace on the beautiful hill.

How must he have felt when he sat in that palace! He could not feel happy, for he was a murderer and a rebel. When he lay down in Nadab's bed, did he never think to himself, 'I shed the blood of the man who once slept here?'

But it was not Nadab only that he had killed; he had killed his children, and his brothers, and their children. What dreadful thoughts Baasha must have had! As he walked in the garden or sat under the trees, he never could shake off the remembrance of his crimes.

One day a prophet came to him. It was very good of God to send a prophet to warn him. Who was the prophet? Not old Ahijah, but a man named Jehu, the son of a prophet.

It was very brave of Jehu to go to the king

with such a terrible message, for Baasha might have been angry, and might have killed him.

But Jehu was a faithful man, and spoke boldly. What was the message? The very same that God once sent to Jeroboam by the mouth of Ahijah.

God said by the mouth of Jehu to Baasha,—'I raised thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and thou hast made my people Israel to sin. So I will make thy family like the family of Jeroboam. I will take away thy children, O Baasha! Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall dogs eat, and him that dieth in the field shall birds eat.'

So you see Baasha was to be treated just as Jeroboam had been. Though he was so wicked he was not to be killed, but his children were to be killed. As the prophet said, so it happened.

Baasha reigned for twenty-four years, and then died, and was buried in his palace-garden. But Baasha knew that his son would be killed, and all his children.

His son's name was Elah. If he had heard what the prophet had said, he must have felt afraid, as he mounted the throne, to think he was so soon to be pulled down from it.

CHAPTER XV.

ELAH, THE FOURTH KING OF ISRAEL, OR THE DRINKING KING.

(1 KINGS, xvi. 8–10.)

ELAH now lived as king in the beautiful palace at Tirzah.

You have not forgotten the city of Gibbethon in Dan. More than twenty-four years ago the Philistines had taken that city, and the Israelites had tried to get it back, but they had not been able all this while to turn the Philistines out of Gibbethon.

Elah was not a man who could lead soldiers out to battle, but he had two captains who could fight for him, and lead out his soldiers. These captains were named Zimri and Omri.

One of these captains led the army to Gibbethon to fight against the Philistines. That captain was Omri. The other captain, Zimri, stayed with the king in Tirzah.

The king little knew what a wicked plan Zimri had made up in his mind. If he had known, he would have sent him with Omri to Gibbethon.

The plan was to kill the king while he was drinking.

Elah was a man fond of drinking; he liked to sit up at night drinking with his wicked companions. He had a steward who was like himself in fondness for drink. The steward, you know, is the head-servant of a rich man, and pays the bills and manages the house. One day Elah left his palace, and went to the house of his steward to enjoy himself in drinking.

It is disgraceful for any man to drink much. When he becomes intoxicated he is below a beast; he cannot speak plain, or walk straight; he talks nonsense, and laughs and shouts wildly: at last, perhaps, he falls down on the floor and lies with the dogs.

King Elah was drinking away when a man rushed into the house with a sword or a spear, or some weapon, and struck the drunken king, and killed him on the spot.

His body was cast into the street, and it lay there unburied till the dogs devoured it.

Thus was fulfilled part of the word that Jehu the prophet spoke to Baasha from the Lord.

Elah had reigned only two years.

The people of Tirzah did not punish Zimri for killing the king, but let him reign instead of Elah. If they had liked their drinking king, they would have slain Zimri for killing him.

No doubt the steward was killed at the same time as the king, though nothing is said of his death in the Scriptures.

CHAPTER XVI.

ZIMRI, THE FIFTH KING OF ISRAEL.
THE KING WHO REIGNED A WEEK.

(1 Kings, xvi. 11–15.)

The first thing that Zimri did, when he had made himself king, was to kill the brothers of Elah, and all his relations. He left their dead bodies in the city of Tirzah, to be devoured by dogs. If any fled to the country, they were killed, and their dead bodies were devoured by fierce birds of prey.

Thus the Lord fulfilled the word that Jehu had spoken to Baasha. Exactly the same happened to Baasha's family, as had once happened to Jeroboam's family.

Whilst this slaughter was going on, Zimri lived in the palace at Tirzah, eating at the table where Elah had lately eaten, and sleeping in his bed, sitting on his throne, and wearing his crown.

But he did not enjoy his grandeur.

Omri, the other captain, was still at Gibbethon trying to take the cities.

Some men ran to Omri at the camp, bringing wonderful news. They said,—

'Zimri has risen up against the king and slain him.'

But the soldiers and the captain did not wish Zimri to be king. They said,—

'Let us make our captain Omri to be king this day.'

So they gave out that Omri was king that very day.

The next thing to do was to set him on the throne.

Omri went up to Tirzah, with a great many soldiers after him.

But they found the gates of Tirzah fast shut. So Omri and his men began to besiege it. They knew well how to besiege, for they had lately besieged Gibbethon. They spread their tents all around the city. In a day or two the soldiers broke open the gates of Tirzah, and rushed into the city.

Zimri heard their shouts, and he was terrified. He knew not what to do. A very wicked plan came into his mind. He went into the palace where he lived and set fire to it. There he remained till he was killed by the flames. It is probable that he was suffocated by the smoke, which is an easy way of dying.

It was very wicked of Zimri to kill himself, for the Lord has said, 'Thou shalt not kill.'

There was no palace now for Omri to live in. We shall soon hear what he will do for a palace.

How long did Zimri reign? Seven days.

How much had happened in that one week? Zimri had slain Elah and all his relations, had burnt the palace, and himself within it, in one short week. It was a week of murder and rebellion.

Zimri was *quickly* punished for his sins. He did not reign, like Jeroboam and Baasha, more than twenty years, but only one.

Yet during his short reign he had time to worship the golden calf, as they had done, and for this sin he was cut off. His body could not be devoured by dogs, because it was burned to a cinder in the palace.

CHAPTER XVII.

OMRI, THE SIXTH KING OF ISRAEL, OR THE BUILDER OF SAMARIA.

(1 KINGS, xvi. 21–29.)

OMRI was now the king of Israel. But soon he had to fight again, for a man named Tibni wanted to be king. Half the people were for Tibni, and half for Omri. So there was much fighting in the land.

When people of the same nation fight against one another, the war is called 'Civil War,' which is the worst kind of war. That word 'civil' does not mean 'kind and obliging,' as we say of

a boy he is a 'civil' boy. It means 'city.' Civil war is war between people of the same city, or land. Such was the war between Tibni and Omri.

It is dreadful, indeed, when people of the same nation are at war. This dreadful war went on for six years; it must have made the land miserable.

At last Omri conquered Tibni. It is written in the Scriptures, 'So Tibni died and Omri reigned.'

When Tibni was dead, then there was no more fighting. But Omri was not grateful to God for letting him conquer. He continued to worship the golden calf, and to walk in the way of Jeroboam. It was his wish to have a grand palace. While he was fighting against Tibni he did not want a palace; he slept usually in a tent in his camp, but now he felt the want of a palace. There was none in Tirzah, it was burned to the ground.

So he determined to build another, but he did not wish to build it in Tirzah.

There was a beautiful hill a few miles off. There was no hill so beautiful in the whole land. Omri wished to build his new palace on this hill. It belonged to a man named Shemer. Omri asked him to sell it, and he paid him two talents, which was a large sum of money, equal to thousands of our money. On this hill Omri built his new palace and his new city. He called the city

after the name of Shemer. Yet its name was not Shemeria, but Samaria.

Perhaps you wonder that Omri did not call it after his own name; but it may be that Shemer, when he sold it, desired it to be called after him.

Samaria became a very famous city. It was the capital city of the ten tribes of Israel. The hill was very steep, and winding paths led to the top. There was a broad valley at its foot, waving with yellow corn. There were hills all round, that seemed to guard it from enemies, and the sides of the hills were covered with tall olive-trees, broad-leaved fig-trees, and trailing vines, adorned with purple grapes.

Samaria was, indeed, a lovely place. The Lord likens it to a garland of flowers upon the head of a man at a feast of wine.*

This lovely city was a most wicked city, for Omri, the king, was extremely wicked. He was even more wicked than Jeroboam. He was the worst who had yet reigned over Israel—worse than Nadab, worse than Baasha, worse than Elah, worse than Zimri. He not only worshipped the golden calves, but other idols also.† Yet he was

* 'Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower on the head of them that are overcome with wine. The crown of pride shall be trodden under feet.' (Isa. xxviii. 1, 3.

† To provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities. (1 Kings, xvi. 26.)

not slain, nor was his body eaten by dogs; but he died in his bed, and was buried in his own tomb in his new city of Samaria. He reigned twelve years; six were spent in fighting against Tibni, and six in building his new palace and living in it. He was not punished for his sins in this life, as Nadab and Elah were punished, but God has judgment in store for those who die in their sins.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AHAB THE SEVENTH AND WORST KING OF ISRAEL.

(1 KINGS, xvi. 29–33; xviii. 13.)

WHEN Omri was dead, his son reigned in his stead.

There are few people who have not heard of this son, for we read more about him in the Bible than of any other king of Israel. He was the most wicked of all the kings—more wicked than his father Omri—and we know that Omri was more wicked than Jeroboam, and that Jeroboam was more wicked than any that were before him. One thing he did more wicked than his father had done—he married a heathen woman.

There was a city called Zidon. It was close to Tyre. These cities lay just at the top of the land of Israel. Zidon was a very rich city, for it sent out ships to other nations with things to

sell, and the ships came home laden with treasures from other nations, such as silver, and gold, and precious stones. In this way Zidon became a very rich city. It was also a very wicked city; it was a heathen city. The chief idol was Baal. The king himself was called after his idol, Eth-baal.

Ahab married his daughter Jezebel. The last syllable of her name, 'Bel,' was the same name as Baal. Jezebel was a worshipper of Baal. When she became queen of Israel she was not content with the golden calves; she persuaded her husband and her people to worship her god Baal. To please her—Ahab built a temple to Baal in his beautiful city of Samaria. In this temple he reared up an altar, and round about he made a grove. The people followed Ahab's example, and built altars to Baal all over the land on all the high places, and under all the green trees.

Jezebel had a great many prophets who taught the people how to worship Baal. She had four hundred favourite prophets, who worshipped in the groves. She showed her favour to them by giving them messes of food every day from her own table.

All these doings provoked the Lord God to anger. No king had ever made the Lord so angry as Ahab did; for he allowed Jezebel to do all she liked, when he ought to have prevented her.

But were there no prophets of the Lord?

Yes, there were many, but Jezebel killed all she could seize.

It may seem strange that Ahab should have a pious servant; but his chief steward was a man who feared the Lord from his youth. His name was Obadiah; he saved the lives of a hundred prophets; he put fifty in one cave, and fifty more in another cave, and he went very often with bread to feed them; and he brought them water also from the nearest streams. His servants must have helped to carry so much bread. I suppose he went to the caves in the night, for if Jezebel had found out the hiding-places she would have killed all these prophets.

What a dreadful state the land was now in—full of idols, and stained with innocent blood!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRAYER FOR PUNISHMENT, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xvii. 1; JAMES, v. 16, 17.)

THERE were many good prophets left in the land of Israel, though Jezebel had slain so many. The greatest of them all was Elijah. He came from the mountains of Gilead, on the other side of Jordan, and he was called the Tishbite. We do not know why.

He wore a very uncommon dress, made of skins, bound round his waist by a leathern girdle.

The people of Israel knew him well as a prophet, but they would not attend to his faithful warnings when he spoke to them against their wicked idolatry. He was grieved at their going on in their sins.

At last he made a wonderful prayer. It was that God would not let it rain for a long while, nor let dew fall upon the earth to moisten it.

What could be his reason for making such a prayer? It was to bring the king and the people to repent of their sins. He knew that if no rain fell, there would be no corn or grass, and that many people and animals would die from famine.

But how would Elijah himself get food?

He left *that* to the Lord. He wanted to save the souls of the people of Israel.

Elijah was a very brave man. He went to King Ahab himself in his palace, and said, 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to the word of the Lord.' What did Ahab say to this?

We do not know why Ahab did not seize him and put him in prison; but perhaps he thought the prophecy would not come true. If he thought so at first, he soon found out how true it was, for month after month passed and no dew was seen, and no rain fell.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHET'S FIRST HIDING-PLACE, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xvii. 1–7.)

AND how did the Lord take care of his prophet? He found a hiding-place for him by the side of a little stream that runs into the river Jordan. Amongst the thick trees a little running brook was shaded from the scorching sun.

This thicket was the dwelling of the prophet.*

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PROPHET'S SECOND HIDING-PLACE, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xvii. 8–16.)

THE Lord could have filled the brook to quench the prophet's thirst, but He thought fit to find him a second hiding-place. It was very far from the brook Cherib.

* As this simple history has been related in 'Line upon Line,' it has been thought best not to repeat it here, but to let the child read it from the Bible, or for the parent to read it to the child.

The Lord told Elijah to go to a village near Zidon.

Was Elijah to go near Zidon? What place could be so dangerous? Was it not from Zidon that queen Jezebel came? Would there not be many heathens there to watch Elijah, and bring him to the queen?

Already a great search was being made for Elijah. Ahab had sent to all the kings round Israel to know whether they had seen Elijah. Would he not send to the king of Zidon, Jezebel's father?

But God promised Elijah that he should be safe. He told him that a poor widow would give him food. She did not live in Zidon, but in a city close by, called Zarephath. She was not a Jewess, but a heathen. It did seem strange that Elijah should go to a heathen widow to be fed.

But the prophet believed God, and he set out on his dangerous journey. He had to go about a hundred miles.

Perhaps Elijah travelled in the night, that he might not be seen. But it was not night when he arrived at the gate of Zarephath, for he found the poor widow close by gathering sticks.

What he said to her, and all that happened, you can read in 1 Kings, xvii. 10–16.

CHAPTER XXII.

ELIJAH'S FIRST GREAT MIRACLE, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xvii. 17 to end.)

WHILE Elijah lodged in the widow's house, a great affliction befell the poor mother. Her little boy died—he was a very little child, for his mother carried him in her bosom, and Elijah also carried him up to his room in the roof, called the loft.

The widow behaved ungratefully to Elijah when the child died. She forgot that it was through Elijah coming there he had lived so long; for when Elijah first saw her she said she was going to make a cake for him before he died. But he had lived all this time by eating the meal and the oil.

Yet the woman spoke unkindly, as if she wished Elijah had never come. 'What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?'

She had committed some sin that she did not think was pardoned, and she was looking to be punished for it.

Till she lost her boy she had forgotten her

sin, but now she remembered it. God wished her to remember it, that she might repent of it.

Elijah answered her meekly, 'Give me thy son.'

He took up the child into his own room.*

Elijah's feelings were much hurt by the widow saying that it was through him her son had died.

He told this to God in his prayer. God likes us to tell Him our feelings.

Elijah said, 'O Lord, my God, hast Thou brought evil upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?'

Then he stretched himself three times upon the child, and he cried, 'O Lord, my God, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again.'

We see the soul had gone out of the child's body, for death is the separation of soul and body. (The *second* death is the separation of soul and body from God, and that is dreadful.)

The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he lived again.

The child could now walk downstairs, and Elijah led him to his mother. Oh, what joy she must have felt.

And was she not ashamed for having been so

* This room seems to have been out of the house, up some stairs outside, because in verse 23 it is written that Elijah 'brought him down out of the chamber into the house.'

ungrateful? Yes, she was. Now she was glad the prophet had ever come. Now she was sure he was a man of God (though she *called* him so before). She said, 'Now by *this* I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.' Would she ever worship Baal again? I think she would bring up her child to worship the God of Israel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ELIJAH'S MEETING WITH AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xviii. 1–20.)

ALL the time that Elijah lived with the widow there was no rain nor dew.

Elijah prayed again that rain might be sent.*

God heard his prayer, and let him know that rain would soon come.

At the same time God gave him a command very hard to obey,—

'Go, show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.'

Ahab had been seeking Elijah for three years past. He had sent to kings of other countries to know whether Elijah was with them, and he

* James, v. 18. 'And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain.'

had made them swear they did not know where he was.

Had he sent to the king of Zidon? That king little knew that Elijah was in his kingdom—in the city of Zarephath.

Elijah obeyed God's command. He left the widow's cottage, and he parted from the little boy he had raised from the dead. He set out to go towards Samaria, where King Ahab still reigned.

About the time that Elijah set out on his journey to Samaria, two other men left Samaria to travel about the land.

These two men were King Ahab, and his pious steward Obadiah.

The king had lost many of his animals, and he was afraid he should lose them all unless he got some more food. Rich as the king was, he could not get hay even for money, for there was none.

So he said to Obadiah, 'Let us go and look for grass, and let us go different ways. There may be grass growing close by fountains of water and brooks. Let us try to save the horses and mules alive.'

So Ahab set out one way and Obadiah went another; and as they went they looked at the little rivulets to see whether they were dried up, and whether grass was growing near them; and they looked in all low shady places in hopes of finding a little fresh grass.

Obadiah went the way that leads to the top of the land. What was his surprise to meet Elijah! The prophet must have been much changed in his looks, as he had lived so long on nothing but bread; yet Obadiah knew him, and fell on his face and said, 'Art thou my lord Elijah?'

You see what honour he paid to the holy prophet.

Elijah answered, 'I am; go tell thy lord that Elijah is here.'

But Obadiah was afraid to do this. He said, 'When I am gone, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you somewhere; and so when I bring Ahab, and he does not find thee here, he will kill me.'

Obadiah told Elijah how he had fed the hundred prophets in two caves, that Elijah might know how much he loved God.

Elijah promised that he would not go away, but stay till Ahab came.

So Obadiah went to look for his master, and brought him to the place.

As soon as Ahab saw Elijah he began to reproach him, saying, 'Art thou he that troubleth Israel?'

What a wicked speech, for Elijah would have saved Israel. He meekly answered, 'I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house; in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and followed the Baal-gods.'

Then Elijah made a great invitation: he in-

vited eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal to come to Mount Carmel.

These prophets were of two kinds: four hundred and fifty were called Baal's prophets, and the other four hundred worshipped in the groves, and were Jezebel's favourites, eating from her table.

Would Ahab gather all these together to please Elijah?

Yes; for he wanted rain, and he thought Elijah could bring it down by his prayers. Wicked people will sometimes obey God in order to get something they want.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT ASSEMBLY ON MOUNT CARMEL, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

The place to which Baal's prophets came was Mount Carmel.

That Mount juts out into the sea. A few miles off runs a little river called Kishon.

Besides the river, there is a deep well in the mount. From that well the water in the barrels may have been fetched.

This was the place to which Ahab came with

the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the groves.

Multitudes came to see the mighty question whether Baal was God, or whether the Lord was God.

In the evening the eight hundred and fifty prophets were hurried down to the banks of the river Kishon, about five miles from the mount, and the people took care that not one of them escaped.

The wonderful history (already explained in 'Line upon Line') is found in 1 Kings, xviii. 20–40.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT RAIN, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

After Elijah had commanded the prophets of Baal to be killed, he passed the evening in prayer on the mountain. At last he saw a little cloud, not bigger than a man's hand. He knew this little cloud would end in a great storm of rain. He desired Ahab to make haste home. Ahab had another palace besides his palace in Samaria. This palace was in Jezreel, another city.

Ahab drove home in his chariot to Jezreel. Then Elijah did a wonderful thing. He ran before the chariot, at least twenty miles, and was

ready at the gate of Jezreel to receive Ahab. Jezebel was in Jezreel. That evening Ahab had a strange history to relate to Jezebel.

He told her all about the fire coming down from heaven, and about all her prophets being slain by the river-side.

How do you think Jezebel liked this history? She was in such a fury, that she sent a messenger to Elijah that very evening, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.'

Why did she not send men to kill Elijah that evening? No doubt she was afraid of the rain leaving off. But, oh! how wicked she was not to believe after hearing *of the fire coming down from heaven.*

This history having been explained in 'Line upon Line,' it will be enough to read it in 1 Kings, xviii. 41–46; xix. 1–2.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ELIJAH'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xix. 1–11.)

AFTER Jezebel's threatening, Elijah made a very long journey. He went from Jezreel to Beer-

1 KINGS, XIX. 5.

'Behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.'—P. 59.

sheba, the lowest city in the land. That was a distance of more than a hundred miles. He did not travel alone; his servant was with him. But when he came to Beersheba he left his servant there, and he went on alone. We do not know his reason for leaving him.

It is probable that good people gave Elijah food as he passed through Judah, where many served the Lord. But now he was going through the wilderness;—how would he get food *there?*

Perhaps Elijah did not wish his servant to stay with him in a place where there was no food.

Yet Elijah found food in the wilderness, for an angel fed him.

Once ravens fed him; then a poor widow; and last of all, an angel.

But, after the angel had fed him, he lived without food for forty days, through the power of God. He travelled through that wilderness, where the Israelites had once wandered *forty years.*

He was only *forty days* crossing it. Then he came to the mountain where God once gave the ten commandments to the Israelites — Mount Horeb. One peak of it was called Mount Sinai.

As the history of Elijah's journey has been explained in 'Line upon Line,' the child will read it in 1 Kings, xix. 1–11.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ELIJAH AT MOUNT HOREB, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

Elijah arrived at Mount Horeb, after fasting forty days and forty nights. Moses, you remember, did the same on Mount Horeb a long while before.

This long fasting prepared Elijah for hearing God speak. There was a cave in which he slept. After sleeping in the cave, he heard the voice of God, saying, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

Then the sorrowful prophet told his griefs to God in prayer. His chief grief was — the wickedness of the children of Israel.

Elijah said, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts.'

How was he jealous?

He wanted the Israelites to love God best, and he could not bear their loving Baal better than God. This was his jealousy — his holy jealousy.

Another thing made him unhappy. He thought there was no prophet left alive but himself: he thought all the good prophets had been killed. This was a mistake.

Then some wonderful sounds and sights were heard and seen on that mountain, while Elijah stood by, hiding his face in his cloak.

As this scene has been explained in 'Line upon Line,' let it now be read in 1 Kings, xix. 9–14.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE THREE MESSAGES, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xix. 14–18.)

ELIJAH was standing at the mouth of the cave; his face wrapped up in his cloak, listening to the gentle voice of God.

Then he repeated his complaining prayer about being the only prophet left to serve the Lord.

'And I, even I *only*, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.'

The Lord replied by giving him three messages. They were hard messages to deliver; almost as hard as the message Moses once had, to tell Pharaoh to let Israel go.

What were these messages?

The first message was, 'Go to Damascus in Syria, and anoint Hazael to be king of Syria.'

The second message was, 'Anoint Jehu to be king over Israel.'

The third message was, 'Anoint Elisha to be prophet instead of thee.'

These were three hard messages, to anoint two men to be kings, and one to be a prophet.

Why was Elijah to anoint these three?

That they might punish Israel for their sins. The kings Hazael and Jehu would slay the wicked with swords, and Elisha would slay with another kind of sword, — the word of God's wrath.

You will be surprised to hear that Elijah *never* performed the first message; he never anointed Hazael to be king of Syria.

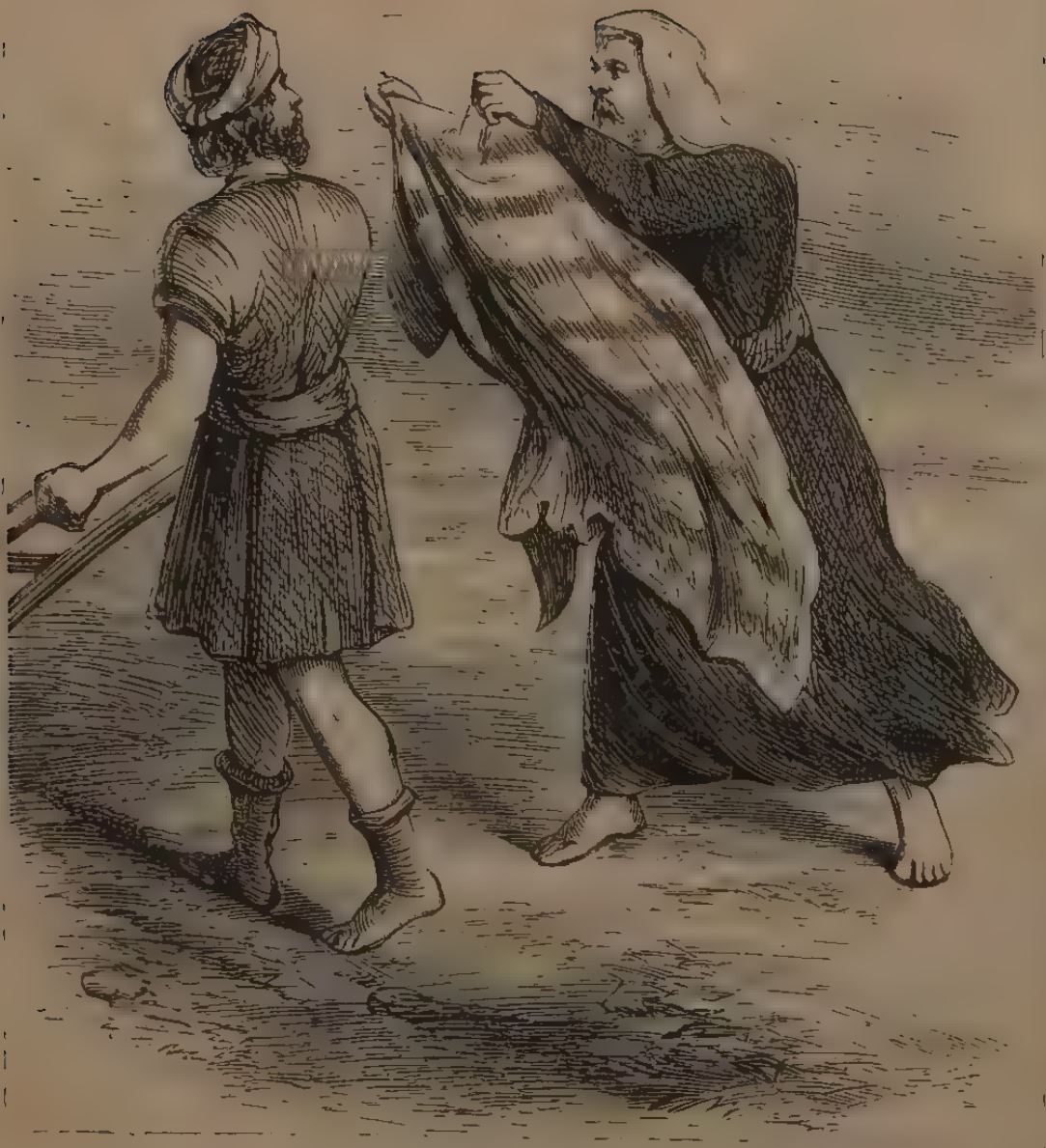
Nor did he ever perform the *second* message. He *never* anointed Jehu to be king over Israel; but he did perform the third message; he anointed Elisha to be prophet in his stead, as you will soon hear.

And why did he not perform the other messages?

Because he left this world very soon; and he let Elisha anoint those kings, instead of anointing them himself.

Elijah did not know then HOW God was going to take him out of the world. He would have been pleased if he had known. A little before, he had requested that he might die. But God had something better than death in store for him.

The Lord ended talking with Elijah by sweet words of comfort, saying, 'I have left me seven



1 Kings, xix. 19.

'And Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.'—P. 63.

thousand in Israel; all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal; and every mouth which hath not kissed him.'

Elijah thought there was no righteous person left; and God said there were seven thousand. Many of them, no doubt, were hidden in dens and caves of the earth.

CHAPTER XXIX

ELIJAH FINDS ELISHA,

IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

It was a long journey that Elijah had to make in order to find the new prophet. He had to go through all the wilderness, but we do not know in what place in Israel he found him.

Neither do we know whether Elijah had ever seen the new prophet before. Now he was going never to part from him while he remained on earth. His other servant had not been a friend and companion to him. Now God had given him a comfort in all his afflictions.

This history has been explained in 'Line upon Line.' Read it in 1 Kings, xix. 19 to end.

CHAPTER XXX.

BEN-HADAD'S INSOLENCE,

IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xx. 1–12.)

AHAB'S great trouble was now over.

What was that trouble?

Famine.

But Ahab had not turned to God through his troubles; he still went on in his sins.

Another trouble came. It was WAR.

There was a fruitful land on the north of Canaan, called Syria. The capital city was Damascus.

There was a king of Syria, named Ben-hadad (which means the son of Hadad). He was a very wicked man, and an enemy to Israel and to Israel's God.

This king came up to Samaria, where Ahab lived in his grand palace. Nor did he come alone; he brought with him an immense number of soldiers, besides horses and chariots.

Thirty-two kings accompanied Ben-hadad. They were kings of little countries round about Syria.

It was a fearful sight to see these hosts of soldiers approach the lovely hill of Samaria.

There were walls all round the city. The Syrian hosts were not able to get in; but they surrounded the city — so as to prevent the people in the city obtaining food from the country. You know it is the people in the country that bring the food into cities. They bring the oxen and the sheep, the butter and eggs, milk and cheese, fruit, vegetables, and corn.

It is dreadful for a city to be besieged, as the food in the city is soon eaten up. Besides this, the Syrians shot arrows over the wall.

Ben-hadad sent some messengers from his camp to Ahab in the city. The messengers were allowed to pass through the gates.

They brought a very proud message to Ahab. It was this: 'Thy silver and thy gold are mine; thy wives and thy children, even the finest, are mine.'

What a daring, insolent message!

Ahab was so much frightened that he sent back a very civil answer: 'My lord, O king! as thou sayest, I am thine, and all that I have!'

Though Ahab sent this answer, he hoped that Ben-hadad would not take away his things, but be content to *call* them his.

But soon the messengers returned and said:—

'Thus speaketh Ben-hadad: To-morrow about this time I will send my servants to search thy houses, and the houses of thy people; and they

will take away in their hands all the things you like best to look at.'

Ahab was much displeased at hearing that Ben-hadad would take away all his most beautiful things. He knew that his lords would not like to lose all their precious things; so he sent for them to tell them of Ben-hadad's rudeness. Ahab said,—

'Does not this man seek to quarrel with me?'

His lords advised him to tell Ben-hadad that he would not consent to let the Syrians come to take away his things.

When the messengers returned with Ahab's answer, Ben-hadad was very angry; and he sent another message to say he would come and destroy Samaria, and crumble the walls and the houses into dust; so that there should be no more than a handful of dust for each of his soldiers. He swore by his gods that he would do so, if Ahab did not let him in.

Ahab sent him back an answer to reprove his pride: 'Do not let a man putting on his armour to go to battle—boast of what he will do, as if he was taking off his armour after the battle.'

Ahab's messengers went to the Syrian camp with this speech. They found Ben-hadad at a great feast. Thirty-two kings were with him among the tents. They were all drinking themselves drunk in the early morning. None but the worst people do this.

Ben-hadad had sense enough left to understand the message. He called out to his soldiers, 'Get ready for battle.'

They got ready, and went towards Samaria, to fight against the city.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BRAVE PAGES OF ISRAEL, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, XX. 13–21.)

AHAB was much alarmed at the great army that surrounded Samaria. He was quite perplexed to know what to do.

Where was Elijah? Where were all the prophets of Israel? Hidden in dens and caves, and wandering about the land.

Now in this time of trouble—one of these good prophets appeared before Ahab. There was no danger of Ahab hurting him now for he wanted his help.

The prophet brought a message from God: it was, 'Hast thou seen this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thy hand *this day*, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.'

What a merciful message from the Lord to wicked Ahab!

The king asked the prophet what he was to do.

The prophet replied that he must not send his soldiers to attack Ben-hadad's, but he must send some young men who were pages to the great lords of Israel.

These pages were young servants who waited on the lords: they were not accustomed to war. Yet the Lord chose them to be sent against the Syrians.

The prophet told Ahab to number these young pages. There were two hundred and thirty-two. What a small number to attack an immense army!

Then Ahab counted his soldiers, and he found they were seven thousand. That was a small army compared with the Syrians.

It was noon when the pages left Samaria to go forwards to the Syrian camp.

At the same time Ben-hadad had sent out his great army to go to Samaria, while he went on drinking in his tents with the thirty-two kings. His soldiers told him that some men were just coming out of Samaria.

Then Ben-hadad cried out, 'Whether they come for peace or for war, take them alive.'

Ben-hadad thought it would be very easy to take them alive, but his soldiers did not find it so; for each of the pages killed the man that tried to take him: thus two hundred and thirty-

two Syrians fell dead. But that was only the beginning of the battle.

Israel's little army of seven thousand came up, and the immense army of Syria ran away; and even Ben-hadad, intoxicated as he was, escaped on a horse with the horsemen; while the seven thousand of Israel pursued, and slew a great many. Ahab himself came out of the city, and helped in the slaughter; he overtook chariots, and slew the horses.

What mercy the Lord showed Ahab in thus delivering him! Would the king's heart turn to the God of Israel?

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BATTLE OF THE PLAIN, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, XX. 22–34.)

THE prophet came a second time to Ahab; he came to tell him that Ben-hadad would return in the spring and fight against Israel. He wanted Ahab to prepare for another war. He said, 'Mark, and see what thou doest!'

Though God took such care of Ahab, he continued the bad man he ever was.

Just as the prophet said—so it happened.

The next spring Ben-hadad's servants advised him to try again to conquer Israel. They thought of a very strange reason why Ben-hadad had not overcome.

They said,—

'Perhaps the gods of Israel are gods of the hills, and that was the reason that the Israelites were stronger than we. Let us fight against them next in the plain.'

The Syrians thought their gods were the gods of the plains. The heathen think there are gods for everything: some gods of the sea, and some of the rivers; some of the hills, and some of the plains.

Ben-hadad took the advice of his servants.

In the spring he came out again with an army just as large as the other that had been conquered; but instead of bringing thirty-two *kings* with him, he put *captains* over his soldiers, for so his servants had advised. It was well to get rid of those drinking kings.

This time the Syrians did not come to Samaria, which was on a hill and surrounded by hills. They went to a great plain—one of the greatest in the world—and they spread their tents near a city called Aphek.*

The Israelites came to the same place, and pitched their tents, but they were so few that

* Aphek was on the great plain of Esdraelon, near Megiddo.

they looked like two little flocks of kids; while the Syrians filled the country.

How could Ahab dare to attack such an army? There he was waiting, when a man of God came to him again.

It seems as if it was another prophet, and not the same that came before.

He brought this message: 'Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, and He is not God of the valleys, I will deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.'

After waiting seven days the two armies fought, and the Israelites slew 100,000 Syrians. The rest fled to Aphek, and there a wall fell down and crushed 27,000 Syrians. So by the wall and by the sword together 127,000 Syrians were killed.

Ben-hadad himself fled into Aphek, and took shelter in a secret chamber.

Again the servants came to give advice to their unhappy king:—

'We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful. Let us go to him clothed in sackcloth, with ropes round our necks. Perhaps he may save thy life.'

Ben-hadad gave them leave to go, and they went and made this humble prayer to Ahab:—

'Thy *servant* Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee let me live.'

Ahab answered, 'Is he yet alive? He is my brother.'

How much astonished the Syrians were to hear him call Ben-hadad his brother!

They had been watching to see what he would say, and they did not expect to hear such a word as 'brother.'

They replied, 'Thy *brother* Ben-hadad?'

They could scarcely believe they had heard right.

Then Ahab said, 'Go, bring him.'

What good news for Ben-hadad in his secret chamber. Ahab had called him *brother*, and had sent for him.

Ben-hadad gladly set out. Ahab came to meet him, and asked him to get up and sit with him in his chariot.

He got up and talked to Ahab. They made an agreement or covenant together. It was that Ben-hadad should restore to Ahab some cities of Israel that had been taken away from Omri, Ahab's father. They also agreed that some of the Israelites should live in Damascus, and that some of the Syrians should live in Samaria.

Then Ahab said, 'I will send thee away with this covenant.'

Ben-hadad returned to his own land, but he did not keep the covenant, nor restore the cities that had been taken away.

Had Ahab done right in making a covenant with Ben-hadad?

No; most wickedly.

Ahab was ungrateful to God, who had delivered him from Ben-hadad.

God did not like His people to be friends with heathens. He wished them to keep away from them, lest they should learn to worship idols.

But Ahab did not care about pleasing God. His reason for sparing Ben-hadad was not kindness, but fear. He thought if he destroyed Ben-hadad, other kings would come against him, and he did not trust in God to deliver him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PROPHET WITH ASHES OVER HIS FACE, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 Kings, xx. 35 to end.)

It was very wrong of Ahab to make a covenant with Ben-hadad, when it was his duty to destroy him. In doing this he acted as Saul had once acted. You remember how he spared the king of the Amalekites, Agag.

God told one of His prophets how much He was displeased with Ahab. There were certain men, called 'Sons of the Prophets.' They were young prophets, and they lived together, and were instructed by older prophets. Elijah was their chief teacher.

One of these young prophets had received a very strange command from God. It was—to ask a man to give him a blow with a sharp weapon. The prophet obeyed, and said to one of his neighbours, 'Smite me, I pray thee.' But the man refused, though it was the Lord's command.

Then the prophet said, 'Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold as soon as thou art gone away from me, a lion shall slay thee.'

As soon as this man had left the prophet a lion found him and killed him.

Surely this man could not have believed the prophet, or he would have been afraid of leaving him. See what came of his unbelief.

The prophet found another man, and said to him, 'Smite me, I pray thee.'

The man obeyed and smote him, so that he wounded him. That man acted right, for he believed the prophet, and obeyed the Lord.

The man who would not smite the prophet at God's command was like Ahab, who would not slay Ben-hadad. That man was killed by a lion, and Ahab would be punished in some way for his disobedience.

The prophet, who had been wounded, took ashes and covered his face with them. No one would have known who he was, because of the ashes. It was the custom of the people in great grief to use ashes as a sign of their grief, and

1 KINGS, XX. 38.
So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way,' &c.—P. 75.

1 Kings, xx. 40.

And the King of Israel said, So shall thy judgment be.'—P. 75.

this prophet was much grieved on account of Ahab's wickedness.

He went to Samaria; he knew the king was gone out, and he watched for him as he was returning. He stood in a place where the king must pass by. When he saw him he cried out. Ahab listened to him.

The prophet then related a very sad history. He said, 'Thy servant (for so the prophet called himself) went out into the midst of the battle. While I was there, one of my fellow-soldiers brought a prisoner to me, and said, Keep this man safe, and if by any means you let him go, thy life shall be for his life, or thou shalt pay a talent of silver. But when I was busy I went a little way off, and when I came back—he was gone.'

The prophet wanted to know whether the king would pardon him for letting the prisoner escape. He *seemed* to want to be pardoned; he did not really want pardon, for the history he related had not really happened; it was only a parable.

Ahab thought it was a true history, and he replied, 'You shall be treated in the way agreed upon.' That is, 'Your life shall go for his life.'

The prophet quickly wiped away the ashes from his face, and then the king knew that he was one of the prophets. Now the prophet no longer spoke in a begging, sorrowful tone; but he delivered a dreadful message from God: 'Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let

go out of thy hand a man whom I had determined to be destroyed, thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.' Now the king knew that he would die, because he had spared Ben-hadad's life. He knew also that many of his people would die — because he had made peace with the Syrians.

The king of Israel went home to his palace in Samaria very unhappy and much displeased. Had he sought the Lord's pardon he might have obtained it, but he went on in his sinful ways till it was too late.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD,

IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

This history has been already told in 'Line upon Line.' It is found in 1 Kings, xxi. 1-16. A few remarks are here added.

Ahab had two palaces; he had one at Samaria and another at Jezreel. He was improving the garden at Jezreel, and wanted the vineyard that lay close by.

But Naboth was right in refusing the vineyard, for no Israelite might sell his land for ever; he must have it back when the year of jubilee came — every fifty years. Naboth felt

that if his vineyard became part of the royal garden he should never get it back, nor his children either; and he knew that God wished all the people to keep the estates that Joshua had divided to their fathers.

Ahab was not so daring in wickedness as his wife. But we must never let another do *for us* what it would be wrong to do ourselves, for *we* shall be answerable for what *they* do.

What a bold sinner Jezebel was to desire the men of Jezreel to get children of Belial (or the devil) to accuse Naboth.

She knew that their work would be the work of Satan, yet she commanded it to be done. This was sinning with her eyes open. Her destruction was certain.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AHAB TAKING POSSESSION OF THE NEW VINEYARD.

(1 KINGS, xxi. 15 to end.)

JEZEBEL told her husband to go down to Jezreel and take possession of the vineyard; 'for,' said she, 'Naboth is dead.'

Ahab never inquired how he had come to die, for he would rather not know—perhaps he guessed; all he cared about was having the vineyard.

He left his palace in Samaria, and after a journey over the hills of about twenty miles, he reached Jezreel, and he entered the vineyard. Now he had got what he wanted. The vineyard was his own. He met there the man in all the world whom he hated the most, Elijah.

God had sent Elijah there. God had told him all that Ahab had done, and what his punishment was to be.

Ahab entered the vineyard on horseback, followed by some of his captains on horseback also. Among them were two young men, whom you will hear of again; their names were Jehu and Bidkar.

When Ahab saw Elijah he gave him his usual name (not friend, but enemy): 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?'

Elijah answered, 'I have found thee;' and then he delivered his dreadful message.

He said, 'Hast thou killed and taken possession of the vineyard? In the *place* where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.'

You see from this how cruelly good Naboth had been treated; he had not even been buried, but left to perish in his own vineyard. Thus Ahab's new garden was stained with innocent blood.

But Elijah prophesied more evil to Ahab. He said his whole family should be destroyed.

There were two kings who lived before Ahab,

whose families had perished on account of their wickedness. Do you not remember how Jeroboam's family perished, and how Baasha's family perished? Ahab's family was to perish as theirs had done.

Elijah had a message about Jezebel also: 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel;' not only lick up her blood, but eat her flesh.

The two young men who followed Ahab on horseback were much struck by what Elijah said, and kept it in their minds.

Ahab himself was filled with misery. He had not humbled himself when another prophet had reproved him about Ben-hadad, saying, 'Thy life shall be for his life;' but he did mind what Elijah had now said. He rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly and humbly.

And was this of any use?

Yes, it was. God sent another message to Ahab by Elijah, to tell him because he had humbled himself, the evils should not come in *his* days, but in his son's days.

So you will find that his *son's* blood will be licked by dogs in Naboth's vineyard. Yet Ahab's own blood will be licked by dogs in Samaria.

Did God forgive Ahab, because he had humbled himself? Oh, no; he was not sorry for having sinned against God; he was only sorry for the punishment.

Ahab was like Saul, and not like David. Nathan once came to David to say, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin.' But Elijah never said so to Ahab.

Do you remember that there never had been a king of Israel so wicked as Ahab? He was more wicked than his father Omri, and Omri was more wicked than Jeroboam, and Jeroboam was more wicked than Saul. So Ahab was the worst of all these kings; yet Jezebel was even worse than Ahab.

Ahab sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, and Jezebel stirred him up.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AHAB DECEIVED BY FALSE PROPHETS.

(1 KINGS, xxii. 1–14.)

AHAB had once made peace with Ben-hadad.

He had made a covenant with him.

What was the covenant?

That Ben-hadad should restore to Ahab the cities that had been taken from Israel.

But Ben-hadad did not keep his promise. He broke the covenant.

How could Ahab expect that a wicked man like Ben-hadad would keep his promise?

There was a fine city called Ramoth-gilead. It

had once belonged to Israel, and had been taken away by Ben-hadad's father ; and it had not been restored to Israel.

Ahab waited a little while, and then he determined to take it away from the king of Syria.

He ought to have been afraid of fighting against the king of Syria, because God had said, 'Thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.'

Perhaps he had forgotten that God once said this, but God had not forgotten it.

At this time there was a very good king who reigned over Judah.

His name was Jehosh-a-phat.

This Jehoshaphat was descended from King David, and from Rehoboam, who had once reigned at Jerusalem.

Jehoshaphat now reigned at Jerusalem, and he ought to have stayed there. Instead of doing so, he came down to Samaria, and stayed in the palace with Ahab and Jezebel.

What a place for a good king to be in !

He must have felt shocked and grieved every moment at all he saw and heard.

While Jehoshaphat was there, Ahab began to talk to his servants about taking away Ramoth-gilead from Ben-hadad.

He said to them, 'It belongs to us, how is it we don't take it back?'

Then he said to Jehoshaphat, 'Wilt thou go with me?'

Jehoshaphat consented, saying, 'I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.'

This was a very wrong speech to make to a king with whom God was angry.

Then Jehoshaphat asked Ahab to inquire of the Lord whether they ought to go.

How could Ahab inquire of the Lord when he did not serve Him?

He sent for such prophets as he liked,—false prophets who only tried to please the king.

Four hundred came and stood in a great place near the gate of Samaria, while the two kings sat on their thrones, dressed in their royal robes.

Ahab said to the prophets, 'Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I not?

The prophets all answered, 'Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into thy hand.'

Jehoshaphat saw that these were not prophets of the Lord, and he asked Ahab, 'Is there not one prophet of the Lord, that we might ask him?'

Ahab replied, 'There is one man named Micaiah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but only evil.'

'Don't let the king say so,' Jehoshaphat gently added.

Ahab knew where to find Micaiah. He was in prison. It seems he had often brought messages to Ahab, and perhaps he was the prophet who had come with ashes on his face.

While a chief servant was going to fetch Micaiah, one of the false prophets was telling lies before the kings.

A prophet, named Zedekiah, made horns of iron, and pushed them before him, saying to Ahab,—'Thus shalt thou push the Syrians, till thou have consumed them.'

All the prophets went on saying, 'Go up.'

The messenger who brought Micaiah spoke kindly to him, as he went along. He said, 'All the prophets speak good words to the king. I pray thee also to speak good words, as they do.'

Micaiah knew that this was bad advice. He answered, 'As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, *that* will I speak.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FAITHFUL PROPHET PUNISHED, IN THE REIGN OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xxii. 15–28.)

As soon as Micaiah appeared, Ahab said to him,—'Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we not?'

Micaiah answered the same as the other prophets; but he spoke in a tone which showed Ahab he was not in earnest, but that he was only trying him—to see whether he would go on in his wickedness.

'Go up,' he said, 'go up; the Lord will deliver Ramoth-gilead into thine hand.'

Then Ahab pretended he wanted to know the truth, saying, 'How many times shall I desire you to tell me only what is true?'

Ahab had never asked him to tell him the truth.

Then Micaiah related a dream he had had:—

'I saw Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, These have no master; let every man return to his own house.' Ahab could understand the meaning of this parable. He saw it meant that he himself should die at Ramoth-gilead, and that his people should be scattered among the hills, for Ramoth-gilead was a town among many hills.

Ahab was very angry, and said to Jehoshaphat, 'Did I not tell thee that he never prophesied good about me, but only evil?'

Micaiah did not mind Ahab's anger, but went on to tell another worse dream.

'I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up, and fall at Ramoth-gilead?

'Some angels spoke, and gave different answers.

'At last there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him, and the Lord said, How?

1 Kings, xxii. 18.
And the King of Israel said to Jehoshaphat,' &c. P. 84.

'He said, I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.'

What sort of an angel said this? Was it not one of the evil angels who stood on the left hand of the Lord?

But the Lord allowed him to go. He said, 'Go forth and do so.'

Micaiah, after telling the dream, said to Ahab, 'The Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.'

Zedekiah, the false prophet, had been listening; and now he went to Micaiah, and gave him a blow on his cheek. He knew that would please Ahab. He said, in a mocking tone to Micaiah, 'Which way did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to thee?'

The faithful prophet did not return the blow nor answer the mockery, but said gravely, 'Thou wilt know which way the spirit went—when thou shalt go into a secret chamber to hide thyself.'

How very angry Ahab was now! He said to the servants, 'Take Micaiah, and carry him back to prison, and feed him with bread and water of affliction till I return in peace.' Bread and water of affliction were very bad bread and water. One of the king's sons had the charge of the prison, and no doubt he was cruel like his father. Micaiah said to Ahab, as he was going back to prison, 'If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me.' And he called out loud to the people, 'Hear, O people, every one of you!'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DEATH OF AHAB.

(1 KINGS, xxii. 30 to the end.)

THE two kings went from Samaria to fight against the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead. Ahab could not help feeling afraid of falling in battle, though he talked so proudly of returning in peace.

He knew that the Syrians would try to kill him, because he was the king. So he thought it best not to wear his royal robes.

He told Jehoshaphat that he did not mean to wear his own royal robes. Then he added, 'Put thou on thy robes.'

He wanted Jehoshaphat to show that he was a king, that people might aim arrows at him instead of himself.

This was very mean and ungenerous of Ahab.

Would Jehoshaphat consent to put himself in danger? Yes, he was ready to do anything to please Ahab. This was his great sin.

Ahab was quite right in thinking that the Syrians would try to kill him sooner than any one else, for Ben-hadad told them to do all they could to kill him. He had called the thirty-two

1 Kings, xxii. 35.

'And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians.'—P. 87.

captains (who helped him instead of the kings), and he said to them, 'Fight against no one so much as against Ahab.'

Was it not very ungrateful of Ben-hadad to try so much to kill Ahab, though Ahab had once spared his life and called him brother? But ungodly men are not grateful.

When the captains saw Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, they said, 'Surely that is the king of Israel!' And they came against him to kill him.

When Jehoshaphat saw them all coming after him, he felt he was in danger. What could he do? He called upon his God. He had God for his help. The Lord heard him and delivered him. The captains soon saw that he was not the king of Israel, and they left off pursuing him.

But though no one knew which was Ahab, that wicked king could not escape the judgment of God.

A Syrian shot an arrow, without intending to kill any person in particular, and that arrow got between the joinings in Ahab's armour.

Ahab saw his blood flowing in streams. He felt so faint that he called to the driver of the chariot, 'Turn round, and carry me out of the army, for I am wounded.' But the driver could not get out of the battle-field, for the men were fighting fiercely all around. Ahab was held

up in his chariot, bleeding as he was, and when the sun was setting, he died.

At the same time an order was given in a loud voice for all the soldiers to go home to their own countries.

Then the driver was able to turn the chariot, and to take the king's dead body to his own city, Samaria.

There was a pool in Samaria, and there the servants washed the bloody chariot. While they were washing it—some of the blood ran down upon the ground, and the dogs came and licked it up.

This happened to show God's anger against him for slaying Naboth, as Elijah had said. Ahab's body was buried in Samaria. And why did God allow Ahab's body to be buried? It was because he had humbled himself when he heard Elijah's message. But Jezebel would not be buried, nor any of Ahab's children, except one. They were to be eaten by dogs or birds.

Ahab had reigned twenty-two years.

He committed many crimes during his reign. He began by marrying a heathen princess. He went on to worship Baal, and he finished by shutting up Micaiah in prison.

And he was the worst king who had ever reigned over Israel.

2 Kings, i. 2.
'And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber.'—P: 89.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REIGN OF AHAZIAH, THE EIGHTH KING OF ISRAEL.

This history has already been explained in 'Line upon Line.' Read 2 Kings, the first chapter.

This Ahaziah had heard of God's words to his father, and how they had all come true; yet he walked in his father's wicked ways. It is said of him, that 'he did *very* wickedly,' (2 Chron. xx. 35.)

It is not said whether he was as wicked as Ahab, but it seems as if he was.

His mother Jezebel was still living, and she must have encouraged him in worshipping Baal.

He would have recovered of his fall from the lattice,* if he had not sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebul (the Lord of flies). He sent the messengers to one of the five cities of the Philistines, named Ekron.

The messengers had gone only a little way when they met Elijah. They were not so bold as to go on; they turned back to Samaria.

Ahaziah was surprised at their returning so soon. But even Elijah's dreadful message did not soften his hard heart, and he sent soldiers three times to seize him. Yet, when Elijah came, he did not try to kill him, as might have been

* The lattice means the rails round the flat roof of the house. Ahaziah may have been leaning against them, when they gave way, and he fell.

expected. But even wicked kings felt afraid of Elijah.

Ahaziah died in his bed, and was buried in a grove. He was the only one of Ahab's children who died in his bed, and was buried. All the rest of Ahab's seventy-two children will come to the awful end that Elijah had foretold.

Yet none could be worse than Ahaziah. But we have already seen that the Lord does not punish sinners in this world as they deserve, but often punishes the least wicked more than the most wicked. There is a judgment to come, when all will be set right.

Ahaziah reigned only two years.

CHAPTER XL.

ASCENSION OF ELIJAH,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM, NINTH KING OF ISRAEL.

This history has been told in 'Line upon Line.' Read it in 2 Kings, ii. 1–18.

A few remarks may be added. Jehoram was not as wicked as his brother Ahaziah, nor was he as wicked as his father Ahab, for he put away the image of Baal which his father had made. He still continued to worship the golden calves. We do not know why he put away the image of Baal. It was not from the fear of God, or he would not have worshipped the golden calves.

2 KINGS, II. 2.
'So they went down to Bethel.'—P. 91.

There were three places to which Elijah went before he was taken up. They were all very near to each other—about ten miles apart. Their names were Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho ; and in each of these places there were good young men, living together, and learning the word of God. They were called sons of the prophets. They built houses for themselves, and worked in the fields for their bread.

Elijah used often to visit these places to teach the young men. These young men knew that Elijah was going up to heaven that day. When they saw Elijah and Elisha go together over the river Jordan, fifty of these young men stood on a hill to watch them; and they saw Elijah divide the waters with his cloak.

But they did not see Elijah go up to heaven; only Elisha saw that great sight. That chariot and those horses of fire were composed of bright angels.*

After Elijah was gone up, Elisha returned over Jordan, and divided the waters with the cloak which had fallen from his master.

The fifty young prophets beheld this miracle; and they felt that Elisha was now their master in the place of Elijah, and they came towards him and bowed themselves down.

They did not like parting with their dear old

* 'The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.'—Ps. lxviii. 17.

master ; and they hoped that he might still be somewhere on the earth. They thought that the Spirit of the Lord, after having taken him up, had dropped him on some mountain, or in some valley. So they asked Elisha's leave to go and look. Elisha did not like their going to look, for he knew his master was high up out of their reach ; yet he let them go when they pressed him very much.

But though they looked for him three days they never found him ; and when they returned, Elisha gently reproved them for their folly and unbelief, by saying, 'Did I not say unto you, Go not ?'

CHAPTER XLI.

ELISHA'S MIRACLE ON THE WATER, IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, ii. 19–21.)

ELISHA stayed a little while at Jericho, after Elijah was gone up to heaven. He stayed there with the sons of the prophets. It was his duty now to teach them, as Elijah had done, while at Jericho. He showed that God had given him the power of doing miracles by the Spirit. This had been his request to Elijah, to have a double portion of his spirit.

The city of Jericho once had great walls, which fell at the sound of the trumpets in the

time of Joshua. Then God forbade every one to build up the city; but a wicked man did build it up in the reign of Ahab. This wicked man, named Hiel, was cursed by God for his disobedience; and he lost his eldest son when he began to build, and he lost his youngest as he finished.

This city of Jericho could not be a good place to live in, seeing its builder had been cursed.

Yet it was pleasant, for it was built on a hill among palm-trees. A little stream sprang up among the hills, and, after flowing ten miles, fell into the Jordan.

So you see that Jericho was ten miles from the river Jordan.

This little stream had very bitter waters. It was unwholesome for the men to drink, and it made the land near it unfruitful; so that corn would not grow there.

The men of the city came to Elisha to tell him their troubles. 'Behold, I pray thee,' said they, 'the city is pleasant, but the water is nought, good for nothing, and the ground is barren.'

Then Elisha said, 'Bring me a *new* cruse, and put salt in it.' So they brought him a jug of salt. Then Elisha went to the spring, where the waters gushed out of the earth and began to flow down as a stream; and he threw the salt into the spring, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters: there shall not be any more death from these waters, nor any more barren land.' From that moment the water

became sweet and wholesome, and continued to be so. What must the men of Jericho have thought of Elisha now! They saw he was as great a prophet as Elijah.

This miracle showed them what God can do to wicked hearts. The heart is like a spring of water. All that flows from a wicked heart is wicked. God can change a wicked heart by His Holy Spirit, as He sweetened the water by the salt. Elisha wished to change the hearts of all the nation of Israel; and he spent his life in casting in the salt of God's word, and praying for the salt of the Spirit.

Was this Elisha's first miracle? Not quite; because he had already divided the river Jordan. Yet it was the first public miracle; for only the sons of the prophets had seen the other miracle. It was something like Christ's first miracle of turning water into wine. How different from the first plague when water was turned into blood!

CHAPTER XLII.

ELISHA'S FIRST JUDGMENT,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, ii. 23 to the end.)

THIS history has already been told in 'Line upon Line,' and therefore it may now be read in the Bible without explanation.

We will just remark that the place of this judgment was Bethel. That was the city of the golden calf, though once of Jacob's dream.

It must have been a very wicked city. Yet the sons of the prophets had a dwelling there. When Elisha left Jericho he went on to visit the young prophets of Bethel.

He had to go about fifteen miles over the hills and through the valleys of Israel. He had now received much honour from God. The sons of the prophets bowed themselves before him, and called him 'My lord.'

The men of Bethel must have thought him very great, now he had healed the waters and the land.

Yet there were bold, foolish children in Bethel, who despised and mocked this great prophet. They had been very ill brought up by wicked parents. They had been taught to hate the prophet because he spoke against their idol. They had heard the story of Elijah's going up to heaven, but they did not believe it, but made fun of it. They wanted the prophet to go up too. They would have been glad if all prophets and all good men had gone up to the sky, that they might see them no more.

They met Elisha before he entered the town, and after passing him they went behind him (like little cowards), insulting him, and reproaching him with having lost his hair. They thought

he was now so old that he had better go up ou of their way. How did they feel when he turned back, and looked on them! Oh, what a look it must have been,—a look of sorrow and of anger! And as he looked he cursed the children. You know what a blessing is. A curse is just the contrary. How terrified the children must have been to hear the curse! It was God who had commanded the prophet to curse them.

I think the bears must have come very soon out of the wood. What a numerous troop there must have been, for the bears killed forty and two children; and yet they did not kill *all* the children. The Lord let some escape. Did those who escaped take warning by the terrible end of their playfellows? We do not know. Too often sinners pay no heed to the judgments of the Lord.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THREE KINGS IN THE WILDERNESS, IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 Kings, iii. 4–19.)

While Elisha was teaching the people, Jehoram was going on in his wicked ways.

Elisha often went to Samaria, where Jehoram

2 Kings, ii. 23.
'And there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him.'—P. 96.

lived, that he might warn him and his people to turn from their sins.

There had been no war during the short reign of Ahaziah; but now that Jehoram was king a war began.

The king of Moab had once been conquered by Israel, and he used to pay tribute every year. Among the hills of Moab millions of sheep were feeding. The king of Israel required the king of Moab to pay every year, as tribute, a hundred thousand lambs, and the same number of rams, with their wool.

The king of Moab could not bear to part with so many flocks; and when king Ahab died, he refused to pay any more lambs or rams.

King Ahaziah had taken no notice of this rebellion, but king Jehoram prepared for war.

He wanted help, and he sent to king Jehoshaphat in Jerusalem, saying, 'The king of Moab hath rebelled against me; wilt thou go with me to battle?'

Jehoshaphat replied, 'I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.' That was the answer he had once given to Ahab.

The Lord had been displeased with him then, and yet he said the same thing again.

Jehoram asked him which way he would go up; Jehoshaphat said, 'Through the wilderness of Edom.' So they went to the wilderness, and got the king of Edom to come with them.

These three kings went seven days' journey through the wilderness, which is one hundred and forty miles : that is a long journey for large armies who must walk.

Soon all the kings were in great trouble from want of water in the wilderness.

Jehoram was a man soon cast down, for he had no trust in the Lord. He began to murmur against the Lord, and to say that the Lord meant to deliver all the kings into the hands of Moab.

Then Jehoshaphat inquired, 'Is there not a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of him?' That was just what he had said once before.

This time one of Jehoram's servants said, 'Here is Elisha, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.' Servants used then to pour water from a jug over their masters' hands.

Jehoshaphat had a great regard for Elijah, and said, 'The word of the Lord is with him.' The kings did not send for him, but they went down to Elisha. This was paying him great respect : different from Ahab's treatment of Micaiah.

Yet when Elisha saw Jehoram, he was quite displeased, and said, 'What have I to do with thee? get thee to the idols of thy father and thy mother.'

Then Jehoram repeated the murmuring speech he had uttered a little before. 'The Lord hath

called these three kings together to deliver them into the hands of Moab.'

Elisha did not like this speech, nor did he like Jehoram, and he said, 'As the Lord liveth, if it were not for Jehoshaphat, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee.' Jehoram did not punish Elisha for this speech, for he wanted water, and he thought Elisha could get it for him.

Then the prophet said, 'Bring me a minstrel.' A minstrel is a player on a musical instrument like the harp or the lute.

While Elisha was listening to the sweet music, the Lord told him by His Spirit what to say.

Then Elisha said, 'Make the valley full of ditches.' He told the kings that there should be no clouds, and no rain, but that the ditches should all be filled with water, and that the Lord would deliver Moab into their hands.

You may be sure that the soldiers dug a great many deep ditches, that they might have plenty of water.

It was well that they believed the Lord.

Jehoram was not like Ahab when he went to war; for Ahab would not believe that he should be slain: whereas Jehoram would not believe he would be delivered. Ahab was presumptuous, and Jehoram was distrustful.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE RED WATER,
IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, iii. 20 to the end.)

EARLY in the morning the Israelites saw water flowing down from the rocky land of Edom into the ditches; and soon the water filled them all. And now the thirsty cattle could drink as well as the army of Israel.

The Moabites were waiting in their tents ready to attack the Israelites. The morning was very fine, and the sun was shining brightly on the wilderness.

The Moabites looked towards their enemies, and they saw red streams winding amongst their tents.

'What can that red be?' they said to one another. 'Surely it is blood. Those kings have surely quarrelled and killed each other, and many more. Let us go quickly and get all we can out of the tents, as the men must be dead.'

But was there blood in the ditches? Oh, no; it was the sun shining on the water, made it look like blood. The Moabites hastened to the tents of Israel. Did they find those tents full of dead bodies? No; full of living men, who rose up and rushed upon them, and killed great numbers, and pursued them a great way.

The Moabites left their camp, and ran towards the chief city of Moab. It was called Kir-haraseth. As the Israelites went along, they did all the harm they could to the land of Moab. They covered the land with stones, they stopped up the wells, and cut down the fine trees.

At last the armies of Israel reached Kir-haraseth, and they threw quantities of stones out of their slings into the city.

The king of Moab rushed out of his city, followed by seven hundred men, with swords; but they could not drive away the Israelites.

The king went back into his city, very unhappy. He thought he had displeased his gods: he tried now to please these horrible idols, and he committed a most horrible act. He went up on the wall with his eldest son, and there offered him up for a burnt-offering. What a wicked deed! Many were angry with the Israelites, but it was the king of Moab who ought to bear the blame.

Now the three kings returned to their own countries: the king of Edom to Bozrah, the king of Judah to Jerusalem, the king of Israel to Samaria.

And did Jehoram, when he returned home, show gratitude to the God who had delivered him? No; he still worshipped the golden calves, and walked in wicked ways, though he was not as bad as his father had been, nor as bad as his mother still was.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE POT OF OIL,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

The history of the miracle of oil has been explained in 'Line upon Line.' Let it now be read in 2 Kings, iv. 1–7.

Elisha showed by this miracle what power the Lord had given him to bless.

It was the third of this kind. The first was the healing of unwholesome water. The second, the foretelling of water in the desert. The third, the increase of the widow's oil.

The first miracle was done for a city; the second for an army; this third miracle for one poor widow and her children.

This last resembled Elijah's miracle of the barrel of meal and cruse of oil; and also our Lord's miracles of the loaves and fishes.

All these miracles show God's tender concern for the poor who are in want of food. The Lord cares still more for those who want the oil of grace and of the Holy Spirit to make them holy and happy for ever.

2 Kings, iv. 5.
And she poured out.'—P. 102.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE GENEROUS LADY,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

This history has been related in 'Line upon Line.' Read 2 Kings, iv. 8–24.

The prophet used to go from place to place in Israel.

There was one house where he was always treated like an angel from heaven.

The name of the place was Shunem. It is in the tribe of Issachar, and only a few miles from Jezreel, where the king had a palace.

Elisha lived about thirty miles from Shunem. He often passed through the place when he was on his way to the sons of the prophets, living at Bethel and Jericho, and when he was returning home.

Elisha's home at this time was near Mount Carmel.*

There he used to hold meetings with the pious Israelites. The good lady at Shunem often went to these meetings. They were held on the days of the feasts at Jerusalem.

The Israelites could not go up to Jerusalem as

* Sometimes Elisha lived at Samaria.

they once did; but such as loved God would never go to Bethel to worship the golden calf; and they were glad to meet together to hear the prophets pray and preach.

When the lady went to see Elisha at Carmel she rode upon an ass, and her servant ran by the side to drive it on.

She was in such haste that she wished to gallop all the way and never to stop.

At first she rode along a great plain, and then she passed the river Kishon (once reddened by the blood of Baal's prophets); and then she reached the hills, till she came to Carmel by the sea.

In that place where fire once came down from heaven—Elisha lived with his servant Gehazi.

Very often he was absent from home, going about teaching; but when the lady arrived, he was walking on the mountain.

He had seen her while she was yet far off; but he did not know what made her come with such great speed.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WEEPING TURNED INTO JOY,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, iv. 25 to the end.)

LET the history be read in the Bible to the child. Afterwards it may be read in this book.

Elisha from the hill could see the lady coming so fast upon her ass, and he knew her at a great distance. But he did not know what made her unhappy.

She showed great faith by answering, 'It is well;' though her child had just died in her house at home.

Elisha did not know the character of Gehazi. Had he known how bad Gehazi was, he would not have lent him his staff, for he might have been sure God would not let him make the child alive.

The lady seemed to know the character of Gehazi better than Elisha did, for she would not go home with him. She had just been treated very unkindly by him, for he had tried to push her away from Elisha's feet as she bent down weeping to the ground.

Elisha went with the lady to Shunem; and there he found the child lying on the bed. No doubt he had before told the lady how Elijah had once laid the widow's son upon his bed.

When the child lived again Elisha did not bring him down to his mother (as Elijah did the widow's son), but he sent Gehazi (who must have been near the door) to call the mother; and when she came, he bade her take up her son.

It is beautiful to see her gratitude, for she fell at Elisha's feet before ever she took up her darling child.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE YOUNG PROPHETS' DINNERS.

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, iv. 30 to end.)

ELISHA continued to travel about to teach the people. There was a place near Jordan, where the young prophets dwelt. It was called Gilgal. There Elisha had accompanied his master before he went up to heaven.

The sons of the prophets were very poor. At this time they were poorer than ever, because there was a famine in the land: for God still sent judgments upon wicked Israel.

Elisha had been teaching the young men. They were all sitting round him when he spoke to his servant. I suppose this servant was Gehazi, but his name is not mentioned. Elisha told him to make some broth. He said, 'Set on the great pot, and boil some pottage.'

We do not know what the pottage was to be made of, whether there was to be meat and flour, as well as vegetables. But while the broth was being prepared one man went out to look for some herbs to put in the broth. He saw a wild vine, and he gathered the fruit. That fruit must

have been wild grapes, sometimes called gourds. The man gathered them in his garment, and quite filled it. Then he went back and shred the fruit into the great pot, thinking how much better the broth would now be.

No one knew what the fruit was that the man had picked. The broth was poured into the cups and basins of the young prophets. They were very hungry, and must have enjoyed their pottage as they sat round, with their friend Elisha, whom they loved, in the midst. Suddenly they called out, 'Oh, thou man of God, there is death in the pot!'

They must have tasted something wrong in the pottage, or perhaps they began to feel ill. Of course they would not go on eating poisonous pottage. It was a sad thing for such hungry men to find poison in their pottage. Besides, there were such a number of them—about a hundred.

Elisha said, 'Bring some meal.' What did he want the meal for? He did not say; but when it was brought he cast it into the pot. Then he said to the servant, 'Pour out for the people, that they may eat.'

The company partook of some more pottage, and found it good and wholesome.

How could a little flour take away poison? It could not of itself, but God could do anything, and He made the flour take away the power of the poison.

Another day a man came from a place about fifty miles off. That place must have been a place where Baal was worshipped, for it was called Baal-shalisha.

The man came laden with food. There were twenty loaves, as well as ears of corn unthreshed. The loaves were made of barley; they were very small, what we should call rolls or cakes.

What a kind man this was to come all the way from Baal-shalisha with his present. Elisha, when he saw the food, said to the servant, 'Give unto the people, that they may eat.'

The servant began to make objections (perhaps he was Gehazi), and to say, 'How can I set such a little food before an hundred men?'

Elisha repeated what he had said before, 'Give to the people, that they may eat.' Then he added these words,—

'Thus saith the Lord: They shall eat, and shall leave some.'

Then the servant set this little food before the people, and they ate, and they left some of the food, because there was more than they could possibly eat.

Thus was fulfilled the word of the Lord. Elisha had now done a miracle, like Elijah's increase of oil and meal to keep alive the poor widow, the child, and himself; but Jesus did a far greater miracle when He fed five thousand on five loaves.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LITTLE MAID'S WISH,
IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

This story has been explained in 'Line upon Line;' therefore it may now be read in 2 Kings, v. 1-8. A few remarks may be added.

You remember the king of Syria, called Ben-hadad ; he lived in the time of Ahab, and he was alive still.

His people still vexed the Israelites by going into Israel—a few at a time—and robbing the cottagers, and taking away their children.

In this way the Syrians had seized the little girl who waited on Naaman's wife.

This little girl had heard of Elisha's miracles. It was right of her to wish that her master could be cured by Elisha. Her little speech about him did a great deal of good.

Naaman asked his king, Ben-hadad, to write to Jehoram, king of Israel, about him and his leprosy.

Ben-hadad did write, but he did not repeat correctly what the little maid had said. She had said that Elisha could cure her master, but Ben-hadad thought that Jehoram could cure him. In his letter he asked Jehoram to cure Naaman.

Having read the letter, Jehoram was in great grief, for he knew he could not cure a man of leprosy. He rent his clothes in his agony; he was afraid that Ben-hadad wanted to quarrel with him, that he might come with his armies to destroy him.

Naaman set out on his grand journey, and went to Samaria, to call at the palace of Jehoram.

Elisha was in Samaria at the time. When he heard of the king's grief, he sent to offer to cure Naaman himself.

His message was, 'Why hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to *me*, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.'

It was the glory of God that Elisha desired.

CHAPTER L.

THE GREAT LORD'S RECOVERY, IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

The story of Naaman has been related in 'Line upon Line.' Read it in 2 Kings, v. 9-19.

Pride and passion were seen in Naaman's conduct when he turned away from Elisha's door, and was going away in a rage, still covered with his leprous skin. What he said in his fury was not true. He said that the rivers of Syria were better than all the waters of Israel.

If you look in the map, you will hardly be able

to see Abana and Pharpar. They flow a very little way, and then fall into two small lakes.

The river Jordan is a fine river, and it flows many miles before it falls into the Dead Sea. But Naaman was like a madman, and did not know what he said in his rage.

He seems to have been kind to his servants, for they loved him, and called him 'Father.'

That little Israelitish maid, she too loved him, and wished him to get well.

At last he washed and was healed. If he had been an ungrateful man he might have returned straight to Syria. But no, he longed to thank the prophet and reward him.

Again the chariot stands before Elisha's gate in Samaria.

He came out of his chariot and stood before Elisha, and praised the God of Israel.

This pleased Elisha far more than his own praise would have done. He liked to hear this heathen declare, 'I know there is no god in all the earth but the God of Israel.'

Elisha would accept no present, though Naaman pressed him very much.

Then Naaman asked the prophet to give *him* a present. Was not that strange? It was a strange present he asked for; it was 'EARTH.' How could Naaman want earth? Was there not earth in Syria?

Naaman thought the earth in Israel was more holy than the earth in Syria. This was a great

mistake; but Naaman had been brought up as a heathen, and he knew nothing good, except that there was one God. He wanted the earth to build an altar with, for he meant to sacrifice to the true God when he returned home. But God did not care what his altar was made of; He wants men to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Naaman asked for as much earth as two mules could carry.

Elisha did not refuse his request.

Then Naaman asked Elisha a question.

You know that Naaman was the chief lord of Ben-hadad. There was a god named Rimmon, that Ben-hadad was accustomed to worship.

Naaman was required by his king to go in the temple of Rimmon with Ben-hadad. Now the question he asked Elisha was this,—

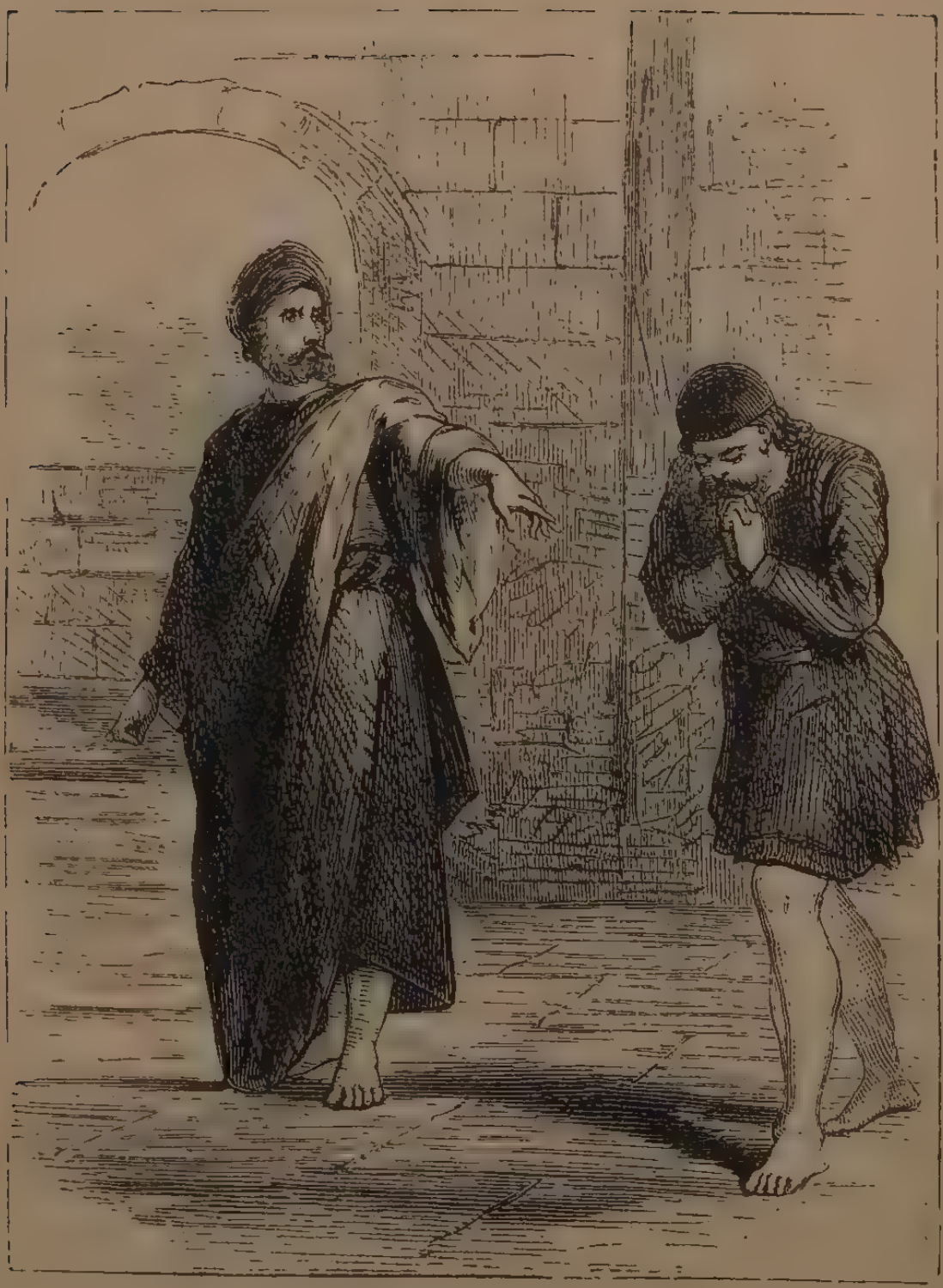
'When the king goes into the house of Rimmon, leaning on my arm, and when he bows down before the idol, and I bow down too, because he is leaning on me, will the Lord pardon me in this?'

Elisha gave a very short answer to Naaman.

'Go in peace.' What did it mean? It seems to say, 'Yes.'

Naaman was a new convert. The Lord God is tender to new converts; they are His lambs. He will not give them hard commands, nor expect them to know much.

Elisha went afterwards into Syria, and there he could teach Naaman more about God.



2 Kings, v. 27.

'The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.'—P. 113.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DECEITFUL SERVANT,
IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

This story having been explained in 'Line upon Line,' may now be read in 2 Kings, v. 20-27.

God did not tell His prophets everything. He had not told Elisha of the death of the Shunammite's son.

But He did tell Elisha what Gehazi was saying to Naaman, and Elisha said afterwards to Gehazi, 'Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned to meet thee?'

God had also told Elisha what things Gehazi meant to buy with his ill-gotten money. Gehazi intended to become a very great man, and to have a large farm and fine garden, and many servants. His heart was full of covetousness, as well as deceit.

He was a very guilty man, because he had been so much with Elisha, seeing his wonders and hearing his instructions. Naaman, a poor heathen, who knew hardly anything about God, was good, while Gehazi was wicked. Why? Because he did not believe.

My dear children, unless you have believing hearts you cannot please God, for 'without faith it is impossible to please Him.' (Heb. xi. 6.)

CHAPTER LII.

THE BORROWED AXE,
IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, vi. 1–7.)

ELISHA often received honour from lords and princes. Naaman, the Syrian lord, honoured him. If he would have accepted presents from Naaman he might have been rich, but he preferred living in poverty with the sons of the prophets.

Once he was staying with some of these good young men near the river Jordan. These young men had a great respect for Elisha, for they had seen him go over Jordan with Elijah, and they had seen him divide the river with his mantle. There were more young men *now* than there had been *then*, and they felt crowded in their house. So they said to Elisha, 'Let us go to the river Jordan and cut down trees; let each of us take a beam, and build a new house for us all.'

They would not go without Elisha's leave. They considered Elisha their master, whom they were to obey.

Elisha said, 'Go ye.'

But this did not content them; they wanted Elisha to go with them.

Ah, they were right in wishing to have their friend wherever they went.

One of them said, 'Oh, do go with us.' So Elisha went.

It is a good sign when children are like these prophets, and wish to have their parents go with them wherever they go.

There were many fine trees growing close to Jordan, for trees grow best by the water-side.

The prophets began to cut down the trees. One of them had no axe of his own, and he had borrowed one. While he was cutting down a tree close to the edge of the river, an accident happened; the iron head of the axe came off the handle, and fell into the river.

There was the poor man with only the handle in his hand. What could he do?

Iron being heavier than water, always sinks to the bottom; so the man could not even see his axe-head.

The river was too deep for him to go into the water and feel for the axe-head.

To whom should he go but to Elisha? 'Alas, master,' he said, 'it was borrowed.'

What an honest man this was, to lament so much not being able to return what he had borrowed! Some people seldom return what they borrow, and do not care about it.

Elisha said, 'Where did it fall in?'

'There,' answered the man, and he showed him the place.

Then Elisha cut off the branch of a tree, and threw it into the water.

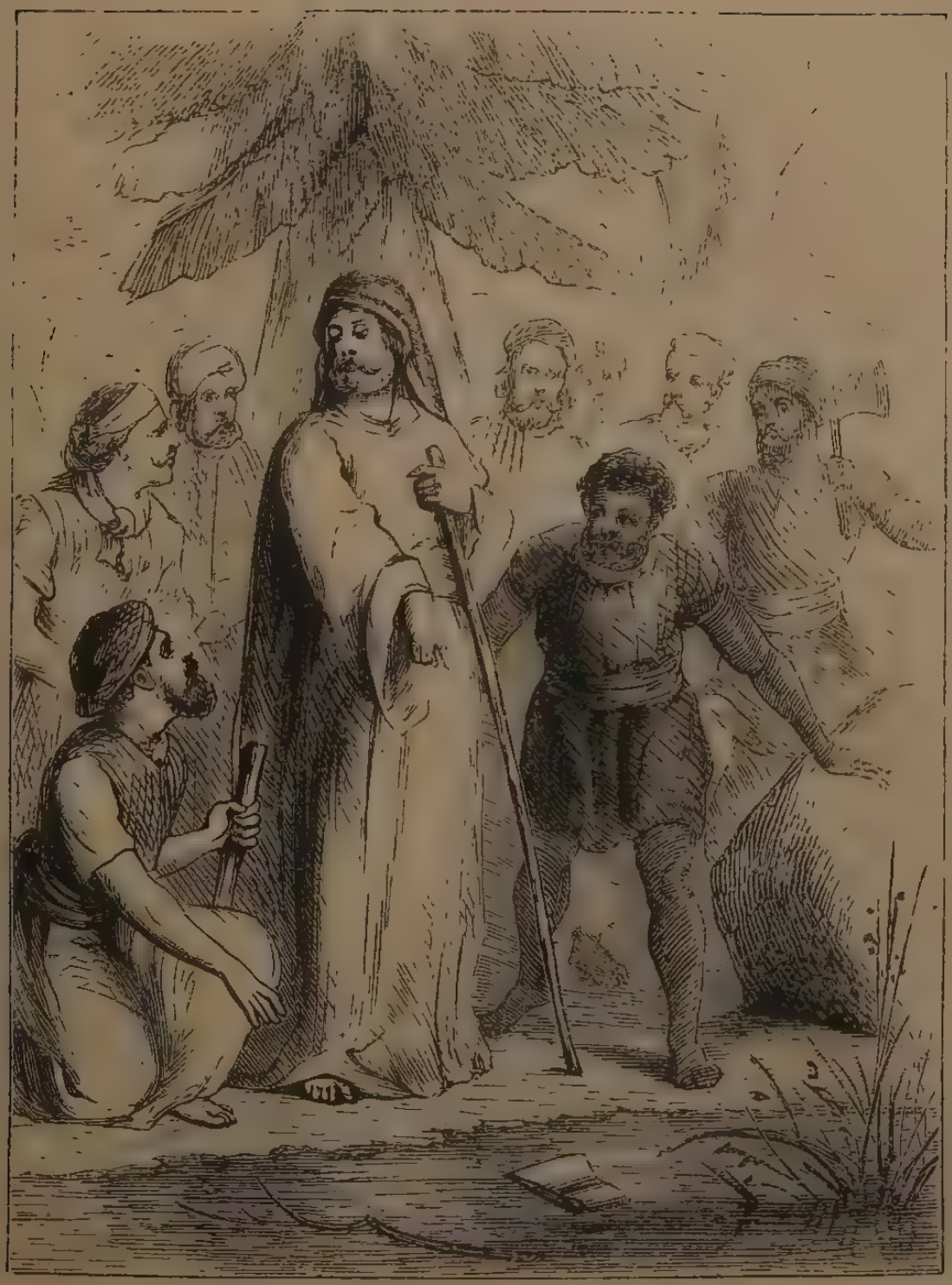
Wood is lighter than water, therefore it swam on the river. But what good could that do? Wonderful to say, the iron axe-head came up and swam as the wood swam.

Then Elisha told the man to take up the iron. He just stooped down and picked it up. He could easily fasten it again to the handle. We may suppose how gratefully the young man thanked his kind friend. How glad he was that Elisha had come with him!

We see from this history that when we have lost things, God is able to make us find them. I have heard of many people who have prayed to God when they have lost something, and have found it soon again.

People who love God have this comfort, that God hears their prayers, and helps them out of all their *little* troubles, as well as great ones.

There is a little parable in this story. We sinners are like the iron axe-head that fell into the water. We fell into misery, and we never could have come up again if it had not been for Jesus. He is called in Zech. vi. 12, 'The Branch,' and He came down to taste the waters of sorrow, in order to save us, and to raise us up from darkness to enjoy the light of life.



2 Kings, vi. 6.
Elisha making the iron swim.—P. 116.

CHAPTER LIII.

ELISHA'S THREE PRAYERS,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, vi. 8–23.)

Do you remember that Ahab once made a covenant with Ben-hadad? The covenant was to restore the cities to Israel which Ben-hadad's father had taken away. (1 Kings, xx. 34.)

Ben-hadad did not keep this covenant, for he never restored Ramoth-gilead to Israel.

Nor did Ben-hadad keep at peace with Israel, but often sent out soldiers to rob the people and take their children captive. You have heard of one of those little captives. It was the dear little maid who waited on Naaman's wife, and who wished her master to be cured by Elisha.

And Elisha did cure Naaman.

Did Ben-hadad behave better to Israel since his captain was cured by Elisha? Not at all better, but worse.

His soldiers were continually going into the land to rob and to kill.

Ben-hadad called his chief men together in

Damascus to make plans about sending out the soldiers. He wanted to take the Israelites by surprise. He sent his soldiers in the night to hide themselves behind mountains or in forests, and to burst out upon the Israelites unexpectedly.

But God told Elisha of these plans.

And whom did Elisha tell?

He told Jehoram, king of Israel.

When Jehoram knew the plans, he sent word to his soldiers to watch, and not to go out near the hiding-place.

Ben-hadad was surprised to find that the Israelites seemed to know where his army lay hidden. He thought that one of his own servants (who knew the plans) sent letters to Jehoram. He was very unhappy about this.

He called his servants together, and said, 'Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?'

One of them answered, 'None of us, my lord, O king! but Elisha the prophet tells the king of Israel the words you speak, even in your bedroom.'

Then Ben-hadad wanted to seize Elisha; but how could he, when he knew what Ben-hadad spoke in secret? However, the king of Syria determined to try to get hold of him. So he sent some of his servants to find out where Elisha was.

Elisha was at Dothan, a city between Jezreel and Samaria. Dothan was built upon a hill.

In the night there came a great army from Syria: this army had travelled a hundred miles,—and what for? To seize *one* man—the man of God.

In the morning Elisha's servant rose early. This was not the wicked Gehazi, but a new servant. The young man went out of the city: perhaps he meant to walk down the beautiful hill.

What was his astonishment to find a great army, with horses and chariots, round the city! He was much frightened; but he looked, and saw Elisha near. He cried out, 'Alas, master, how shall we do?'

Elisha answered, 'Fear not: there are more with *us* than with *them*.'

How could this be? The servant did not see any soldiers of Israel.

Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray Thee open his eyes, that he may see!'

Was the young man blind?

No; he could see the Syrians, but he could not see angels; neither can we. But when his eyes were opened he could see them. Oh, what a sight! The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. They were come to guard the holy prophet from his

enemies. Elisha had seen a chariot and horses of fire once before. Elisha could not be afraid, with all these angels round him.

But the Syrians did not see them, and they came down to Elisha where he was standing on the hill.

So Elisha prayed again, 'Smite this people, I pray Thee, with blindness!'

Immediately they were made blind. The same God who made the servant *see* what he could not see before, made this army *blind*.

Now they could not seize Elisha, nor could they find their way home.

Elisha told them to follow him, and that he would bring them to the man they were looking for. He said, '*This* is not the city,' for Elisha had gone out of Dothan. So they followed Elisha to Samaria.

King Jehoram lived there. Oh, how he would wonder to see Elisha leading a Syrian army into his city!

When they were all in the midst of the city, Elisha prayed again, 'Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.'

And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw.

Then they found out they were in Samaria, the chief city of Israel. They must have been frightened to find themselves there, and to see Jehoram and to see Elisha.

Now it would be easy for the men of Samaria to kill them, and Jehoram wished to do so; but he felt he must ask leave of Elisha, for he had brought the army there.

'My father,' he said, 'shall I smite them?—shall I smite them?'

But Elisha would not deceive them by bringing them, like beasts, into a trap to be killed.

He answered, 'If you had taken prisoners in war, would you kill them? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master' (even to Ben-hadad).

So Jehoram prepared a great dinner for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away; and they went to their master.

What a wonderful history they had to relate to their master!

Ben-hadad left off sending bands of soldiers to hunt the Israelites.

Jehoram seemed good in obeying Elisha; but he was really as bad as ever. He only obeyed Elisha because he wanted his help.

He will turn against him very soon, and even order him to be killed. Yes, he will do this, though he called him 'Father.'

CHAPTER LIV.

THE HORRIBLE MEAL,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, vi. 24–31.)

JEHORAM had followed the advice of Elisha, and had treated the Syrian soldiers very kindly. Though they had tried to seize Elisha, they had been fed and allowed to return home.

Ought not Ben-hadad to have been grateful for this kindness?

But he was not. He had been ungrateful to Ahab for sparing his life, and now he was ungrateful to Jehoram for sparing the lives of his soldiers.

He saw it was no use to send small bands of soldiers; so he gathered a great army together, and went up himself into the land of Israel. Naaman, his captain, would not like to fight against Israel. We must feel sure that he did not come, for we never hear his name again.

Ben-hadad went to Samaria, the chief city of Israel, and he placed his armies all round it. No Israelite could come out of the city, and no food could be brought into the city. Thus he besieged Samaria. After a while most of the food was eaten up, and very little was left.

Good Elisha was in the city, and he must have been half starved, as well as the rest of the people. He could have gone out of the city before Ben-hadad came, but he liked to be where God sent him.

Jehoram was very unhappy because his city was besieged, and he wore sackcloth under his clothes, next his skin, as a sign to God of his grief; but he did not repent. He felt angry with God for afflicting his people.

Food was very dear. Mutton and beef could not be had; asses were eaten instead. An ass's head came, at last, to cost ten pounds of our money. There was no butter, nor milk, nor fruit, for no one could bring them into the city. A very coarse kind of grain, called doves'-dung, was sold: it cost four shillings a pint. Poor people had no money left, and they were almost starved.

One day the king was walking on the wall: from that high place he could see the Syrian tents beneath.

Suddenly he heard a voice. It was a woman crying, 'Help, my lord, O king!'

The king knew that she was in want of food, and he answered, 'If the Lord do not help thee, how can I? Is there any corn in the barn, or any wine in the press? What is the matter with you?'

Then the crying woman pointed to a woman standing near, and said, 'This woman said to me yesterday, If you will kill your son to-day for us to eat to-day, we will eat my son to-morrow.

So we boiled my son and ate him, and now she has hid her son.'

Oh, what wicked women these were! What answer could the king give? Both the women deserved to die for the horrible deed they had done. But *now* every one did as they pleased.

The king was so horrified that he tore his clothes, and then the people saw that there was sackcloth underneath.

But though his grief was so great, the king did not repent; he only grew more angry with Elisha, and he swore that the head of Elisha should not stand on him that day.

See how ungrateful he was to the prophet who had lately delivered him from the Syrians. *Then* he called him 'My father,' and *now* he wants to kill him. Ungodly people soon change.

Jehoram sent a messenger to Elisha, in his house, for his head to be taken off immediately.

CHAPTER LV.

THE UNBELIEVING LORD,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 Kings, vi. 32, 33; vii. 1, 2.)

While Jehoram was walking on the wall, Elisha was sitting in his house. Around him sat some elders, good men, who liked to hear his instructions and his prayers.

But though Elisha was sitting there, he knew what was passing on the wall, for God told him. He knew the words that Jehoram had just uttered.

He said to the elders sitting around, 'See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away my head!'

Whom did Elisha mean by the murderer? Ahab.

And who was the son of the murderer? Jehoram.

Then Elisha added, 'When the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?'

Elisha knew that Jehoram would come just after his messenger.

While he was saying this—the messenger came. But as soon as he was come in, the elders shut the door and held him fast.

Just after the messenger had been seized the sound of his master's feet was heard, and a voice saying, 'Behold this evil is from the Lord. Why should I wait for him to help me any longer?'

Those wicked words were spoken by Jehoram. His heart was full of anger against the Lord, as well as against Elisha.

We are sure that Elisha opened the door to the king, though it had been shut.

The messenger was still held fast, and could not get away.

The king was leaning on the arm of one of his lords. That lord was even worse than the king.

Elisha then spoke to the king, and to the lord, and to all around.

Did he not utter words of anger, and threaten punishment from God?

No. He had a message of great mercy from the Lord. He said, 'To-morrow about this time a peck of flour will be sold for half-a-crown, and two pecks of barley for the same.'

What a wonderful change this would be!

A peck contains sixteen pints. One pint of very coarse flour was now worth four shillings, and soon sixteen pints would only cost half-a-crown. What a merciful promise!

But the lord on whose arm the king leaned, answered in a sneering, mocking manner, 'If the Lord were to make windows in heaven, might this thing be.'

Well; and could not the Lord make windows in heaven? Had He not once rained manna from heaven? But the lord did not believe that God could do as he said.

Unbelief is a very great sin, and the unbelieving lord would have a very great punishment.

Elisha said to him, 'Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not taste thereof.'

This was to be the punishment of unbelief: on the morrow there would be many good things to eat, but the lord would not taste one morsel.

Elisha did not tell him how it would happen. God has wonderful ways of doing things, which no man can think of.

We do not know what the king said, but you will see that he did not believe in the merciful promise.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FOUR SELFISH LEPERS, IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, vii. 3 to the end.)

How did God bring to pass the wonderful promise that Elisha had uttered?

He did not make windows in heaven, but He did something quite as wonderful.

That evening He caused the Syrians to hear noises. There were no noises really, but all the Syrians thought they heard the rolling of chariots, and the prancing of horses, and the shouts of a great army; and they said to one another, 'Surely the king of Israel has hired other kings to come against us; he has promised them money, and they have come,—the kings of the Egyptians and of the Hittites.'

Then the Lord made the Syrians so frightened that they all ran away as fast as they could, leaving their horses and asses tied up in their tents.

How dreadfully frightened they must have been for them not to stay to get on their horses. They ran, thinking that men were running after them to kill them.

But the Israelites in Samaria did not know that the Syrians were gone; they did not hear them run away, and they might have stayed in the city had it not been for four leprous men.

These men were sitting in the gate of Samaria. They were not allowed to come into the city because they would make men unclean if they touched them.

These four men were dying from hunger. We do not know their names. It may be that Gehazi was one, but we cannot tell.

These lepers kept each other company, as they might not be with other men. In their misery they said to each other, 'Why do we sit here till we die? Had we not better give ourselves up to the Syrians? Perhaps they will let us live; but if they kill us, we can but die; for we shall die here if we remain.'

Having said this, they rose up that evening and went out of the city. It was nearly dark when they went out. They expected to see fierce soldiers, and they intended to fall at their feet and beg for mercy; but they saw nobody, and they heard no noise; they saw horses and asses tied up, and they may have heard their neighing and braying, but that was all. They found in one tent some food. They were very hungry, and

they ate and drank. That was not wrong. They saw also silver and gold, and splendid clothes. They took a good deal away, and went and hid it. This was covetous and dishonest in the lepers.

Then they went into another tent, and carried away more things, and hid them also. Soon they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. We have good news to tell, and we say nothing. In the morning, when it is light, we shall get into trouble. Let us go and tell the king's servants.'

What selfish men they were! They felt no pity for their starving countrymen, and they only told, because they were afraid of getting into disgrace if they did not tell.

So they went back to the gate, and called to the porter who had the charge of it, and told him that there was no one in the Syrian camp.

That porter called to the other porters, and they told it to the king's servants, and they told it to the king.

And when the king heard it, did he say, 'This is the promise that Elisha told me of?'

Oh, no! He had not believed the promise; and now he thought that the Syrians were not really gone away, but that they were deceiving him.

'This is it,' said he: 'they know that we are hungry, and they have gone to hide themselves in the fields, and they will come out and catch us in their tents.'

And one of the servants said, 'There are only five horses left in the city; let us send men on horseback and see.' What had become of the other horses? Surely they had been eaten up.

Jehoram allowed the servants to go on two of his own chariot-horses. He said, 'Go and see.'

They went, and found the road strewn with things that the terrified Syrians had thrown away, in order that they might run faster: there were garments, and bags, and jars, and such things.

The messengers went on the road as far as Jordan, where the Syrians had crossed to go home. And then they returned and told the king.

How eagerly the poor hungry people rushed out of the city! It was necessary to place some one at the gate to keep order. The king appointed that favourite lord (on whose arm he used to lean) to be keeper of the gate. It was a sad honour for him. The people, in rushing out, threw him down, and then trampled him under foot; they could not help trampling on him, for those behind pushed on those before.

Thus the word of the Lord was fulfilled. The unbelieving lord saw the plenty with his eyes, but never tasted one morsel of the food.

What anguish it will give to the wicked hereafter to see the happiness of the righteous, and not to be allowed to share in their joy! Yet so it will be, for God has said to them, 'Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold,

my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart.' Isa. lxv. 13, 14.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LORD'S GOODNESS TO THE SHUNAMMITE, IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, viii. 1–6.)

WHAT a great deliverance God had granted to Israel! But Jehoram did not turn from his sins. Therefore the Lord sent another affliction; it was the same that He had sent in the days of Elijah, —famine; but it was to last twice as long. In Elijah's time the famine lasted three years and a half; in Elisha's time it lasted seven years. God told Elisha that He was going to send this famine.

Elisha had a friend whom he wished to save from suffering and sorrow. It was the lady whose son he had once restored to life. He went to her house at Shunem, where he had so often slept in the little room. He said to her, 'Go with your household and stay in some other country, wherever you can; for the Lord is going to send a famine, and it will last seven years.'

He did not tell her where to go; so she went where she thought best. She heard there was corn in the land of the Philistines, and she went

there. She must have been very sorry to leave her pleasant house and fields, and to go far away from the holy prophet.

She set out with her son and her servants, and travelled more than a hundred miles, till she came to the five cities of the Philistines, in the lower part of the land, near the sea-side.

There she lived for seven years, among the men who hated Israel so much in the days of Samson.

At the end of that time the famine was over. How gladly the lady returned to her old home!

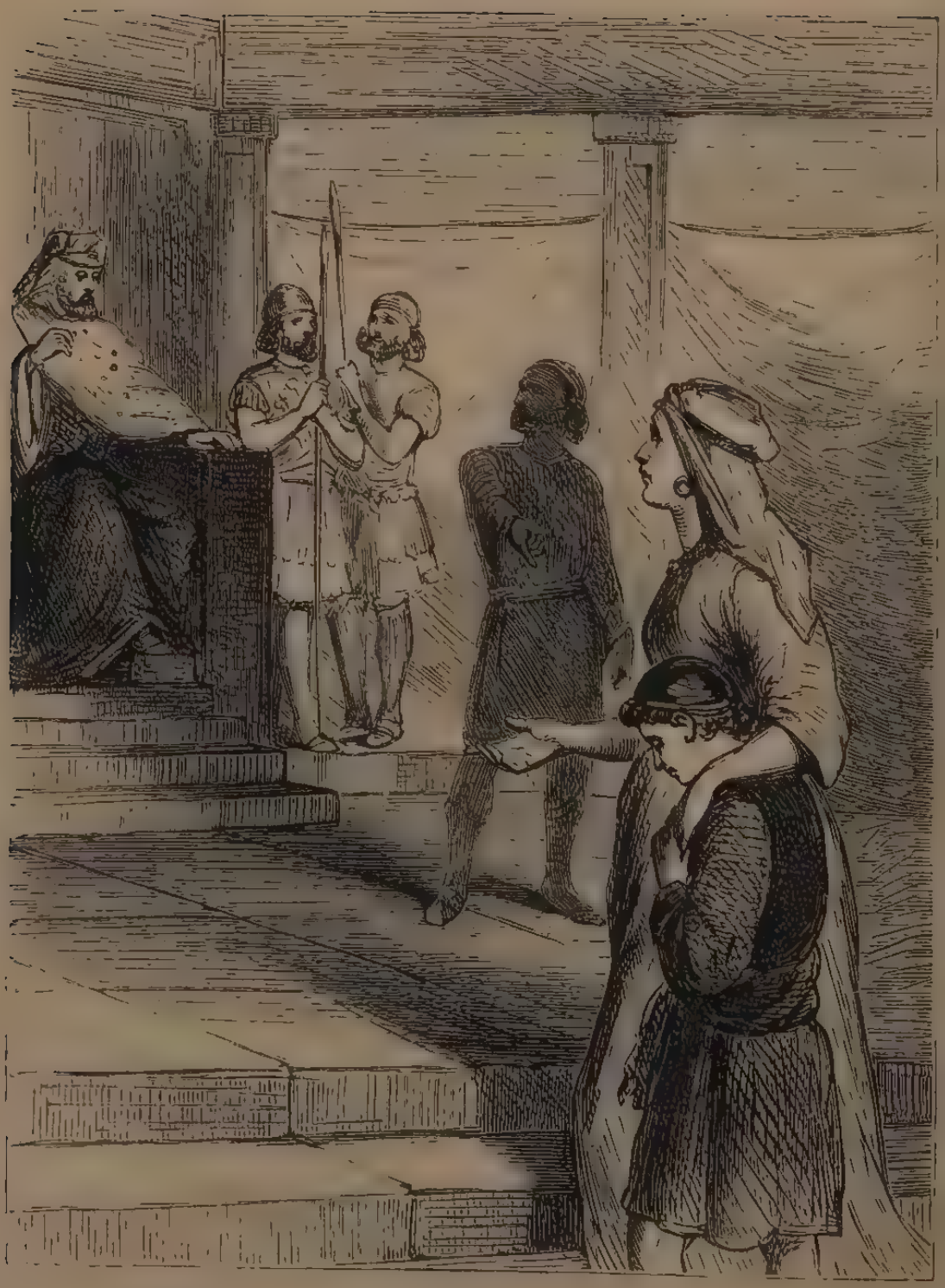
It seems that her husband was dead, and that she was a widow. Wicked men are often unkind to widows, and take away their things. This woman found that some person had taken possession of her house and land, and would not give them back.

What a disappointment to the lady and her son! The boy was now about thirteen, so he was too young to help his mother in getting back her land.

Did she go to Elisha? He could not restore the land. It was for the king to do that, and so she went to him.

Now let us see what Jehoram is doing. He is sitting in his palace, and he is talking to a leper. How strange for a king to keep such company! But people might talk to lepers, if they did not touch them.

Who was this leper? Gehazi.



2 Kings, viii. 5.

'And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.'—P. 133.

Perhaps he was one of the four lepers that once stood at the gate? We do not know whether he was one of these or not.

The king knew that Gehazi had once lived with Elisha, and he said to him, 'Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.'

Gehazi could tell him of the widow's oil, and the poisoned pottage; but the greatest of all the miracles was the restoring the Shunammite's son to life.

I wonder whether he told him also of the dreadful lie which made him a leper? The king already knew how Naaman was cured of his leprosy.

The king was very much interested in the story of the little boy.

Just as Gehazi was telling this wonderful story, the Shunammite lady, with her little son, arrived at the palace to beg the king to restore her lands.

Gehazi said to the king, while he looked towards the lady and her son, 'My lord, O king! this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.'

Then the king asked the woman whether her son had really been raised from the dead, and she told him that he really had been raised.

The king felt so much interest in this woman that he said to one of his servants, 'Let this woman have her land back.' He also desired that she should have what had grown on her land

—the corn, wine, and oil—or the price that had been paid for these fruits.

How happy the woman must have been when she was settled in her old house again with her boy, and when Elisha came again to lodge in the little room!

How wonderfully God had made everything happen for the good of this woman! When her child died, she said, 'Well!' And so it was; for through that boy being raised—she was noticed by the king, and restored to her home. Her kindness to Elisha was richly rewarded; for not only did she have a son through Elisha's prayers, but she knew of the famine before it came to pass, through Elisha's wisdom.

God has said, 'He that giveth to the poor shall not lack,' or want anything. (Prov. xxviii. 27.)

So it was with the Shunammite.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BEN-HADAD'S DEATH-BED,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 KINGS, viii. 7–15.)

ELISHA was continually travelling about the land, teaching and doing good.

One day he went beyond Israel. He turned

his steps to the north, and took his journey near the snow-topped hills of Lebanon and Hermon.

He was now in the land of Syria, where Ben-hadad was king. He went on till he came to the old city of Damascus, the capital of Syria.

There was one Syrian who would have rejoiced to see Elisha, even Naaman the Captain, but we do not know whether he was alive or dead.

But there was another Syrian who had once sent his men to seize Elisha.

Who was that man? He was the king Ben-hadad. He was now lying very ill in bed.

His servants came and told him, 'The man of God is come here.' (Great was the respect that the Syrians felt for Elisha, so they called him by this name, 'Man of God.')

Ben-hadad also held Elisha in the highest honour, for the miracles he had done. So when he heard that Elisha was in Damascus, he thought he might be able to tell him whether he should recover from his illness. He knew that the God of Israel often told Elisha what would happen.

So he said to his chief servant, Hazael,—

'Go, take a present in thine hand, and go meet the Man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?'

Then Hazael got ready a present. Such a present! He could not carry it in his hand.

The present was so large that forty camels were wanted to carry it. All the good things of

Damascus were got together as a present for Elisha.

There were many good things in Damascus. Naaman once brought some to offer to Elisha, but he would not have them. There was silver and gold, and splendid clothes, and many things beside.

Hazael went with his camels to find Elisha. What must Elisha have thought of such a present? But he never took presents from heathen people.

Hazael treated Elisha with such respect that he stood before him. Then he said, 'Thy son Ben-hadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?'

Then Elisha answered, 'Go, say unto him, Thou *mayest* certainly recover.'

This was the message.

But Elisha added something very different, which was not a message, 'However, the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.'

How could this be? Elisha meant that Ben-hadad would not die of his disease, but that he would die in some other way.

Having said this, Elisha fixed his eyes so earnestly upon Hazael that Hazael felt ashamed of being so looked at. Then the tears ran down the prophet's face.'

Hazael said, 'Why weepest thou?'

Then Elisha told him how cruelly he would treat the people of Israel; burning their cities,

killing their young men, and dashing their children to the ground. This made the prophet weep, for he loved the people of Israel.

Then Hazael answered, 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?' He seemed to think he was little better than a poor dog, and that he was not able to hurt the Israelites. He did not care whether he did a *wicked* thing; he only thought of doing a *great* thing.

Then Elisha uttered these remarkable words, 'The Lord hath showed me thou shalt be king over Syria.'

It was to tell Hazael *this*—that Elisha had come to Damascus.

Hazael wished very much to be king, and he determined to kill his master.

When he returned Ben-hadad inquired, 'What did Elisha say to thee?'

Hazael replied, 'He told me that thou shouldest recover.'

This was not true. The prophet had not said he *would* recover; only that he *might*.

Ben-hadad lay one more night in his bed. No doubt he was cheered by the hope of getting well and of being better next morning.

But when that morning came, Hazael dipped a thick cloth in water, and placed it over the king's face. Then the sick man could not breathe, and so he died.

So the wicked Hazael sat upon his throne.

Do you remember how God once told Elijah

to anoint three persons to slay many of the Israelites?

Yes. The first of these persons was Elisha.

How did he slay people in Israel?

By his words, when he told them of the punishments God was going to send. Thus he warned the wicked children of their death from the bears.

Another of these persons who was to punish Israel was Hazael. Though it is not said that Elisha anointed him, yet Elisha did what was the same as anointing him: he told him he would be king of Syria.

We shall soon hear of the *third* person that Elisha would make king to punish Israel. Elisha would do it, instead of Elijah.

The Lord does not let the wicked go on always without punishment.

CHAPTER LIX.

JEHORAM, THE WOUNDED KING.

(2 KINGS, viii. 28, 29.)

WHAT a dreadful prophecy Elisha made about Hazael!

It was, that he should do a great deal of harm to the people of Israel.

Very soon there was war between Hazael and Jehoram.

What was the war about?

It was about that city of Ramoth-gilead which you have often heard of. That city was just over the river Jordan. It once belonged to Israel; but long ago the Syrians had taken it away.

Ben-hadad had promised to restore it, but he had broken his word, and had never restored it.

Now Jehoram went up to Ramoth-gilead to take it from Hazael.

While he was fighting under the walls of Ramoth-gilead he was wounded by the Syrians, as once his father Ahab had been. But he was not mortally wounded; he did not die of his wounds (as Ahab did from his); yet he could not stay in the camp; he had to return home to be healed of his wounds.*

He had two homes, one was in Samaria, the other in Jezreel. This time he went to Jezreel (the place where Naboth's vineyard once was).

When at Jezreel he was nursed and attended by his servants.

His mother Jezebel was there. It is probable that she loved her son, and showed pity for his wounds. But it was sad for him to have such a

* Thus Jehoram escaped the sword of Hazael, as God had said to Elijah. The latter part of the prophecy would soon be fulfilled, 'He that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehus lay.' (1 Kings, xix. 17.) Jehoram was the man who had escaped the sword of Hazael.

wicked mother near him. She would not advise him to repent and turn to God, but she would encourage him to worship idols. He had put away the image of Baal which his father had made; but he still worshipped the golden calves.

The day of his punishment was drawing very near. It came quite suddenly and by surprise.

CHAPTER LX.

THE CAPTAIN MADE KING,

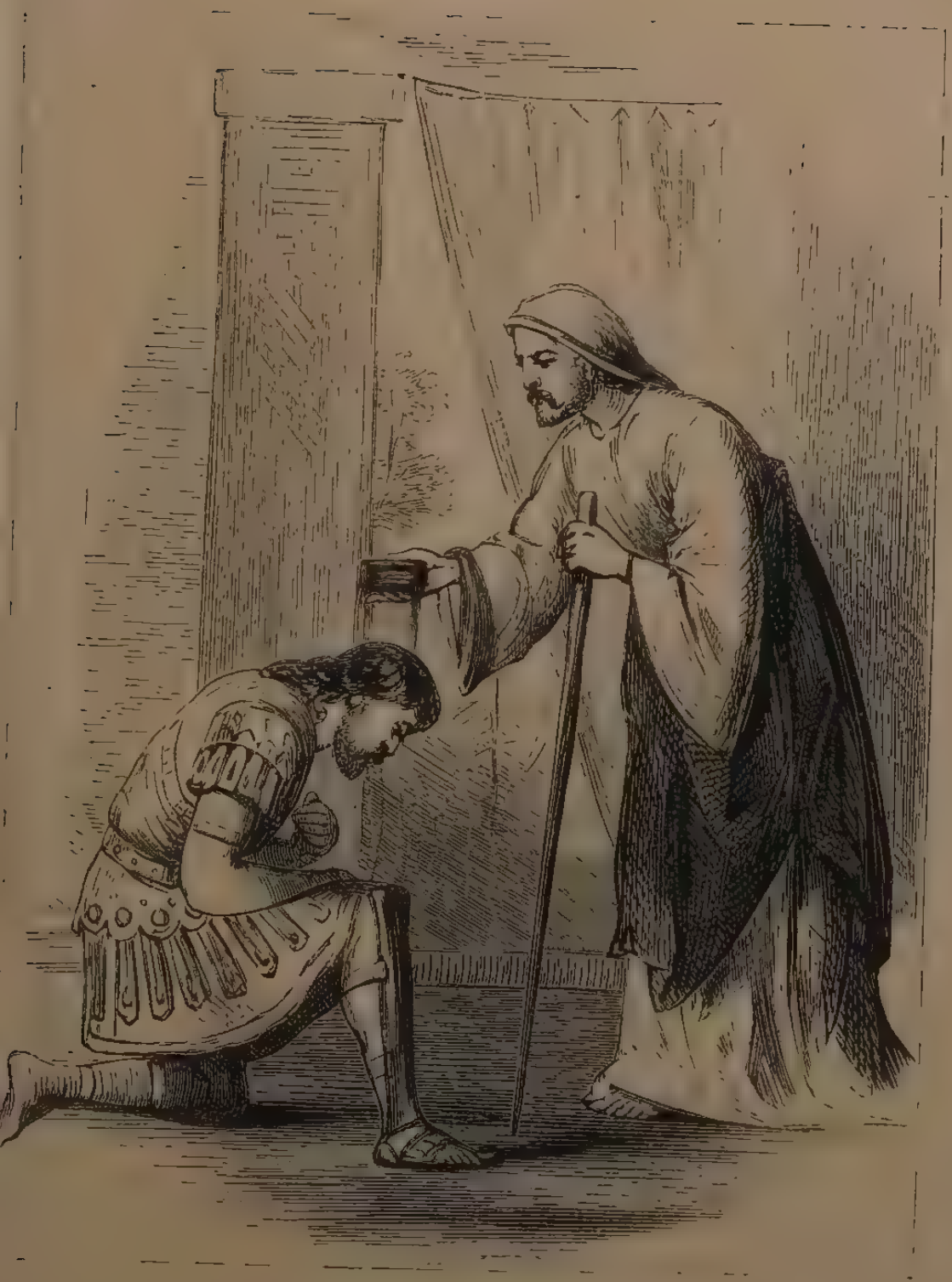
IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM.

(2 Kings, ix. 1–10.)

One day Elisha called one of the sons of the prophets, and said to him, 'Gird up thy loins and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead, and when thou comest there—look out among the captains for a man named Jehu, and ask him to go with you into a private room. Then take this box of oil and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king of Israel. Then open the door, and run away very fast.'

Was not this a wonderful message?

But this was not *all* the message. Elisha told the young prophet to say a good deal more to Jehu.



2 KINGS, IX. 3.
Jehu appointed King.—P. 140.

Have we ever heard of Jehu before?

Yes, once.

He was one of the three men whom God told Elijah to anoint to punish Israel.

One of those men was Elisha, and another was Hazael, and the third was Jehu.

Elijah himself called Elisha to be a prophet, Elisha told Hazael he would be king of Syria, and now a young prophet was to anoint Jehu king of Israel.

We do not hear when Elisha or Hazael were anointed, but we are now going to hear of Jehu being anointed.

At that time the army of Israel was still at Ramoth-gilead. The Israelites had got possession of the city. But it was necessary for many soldiers to guard it, as Hazael would try to get it back.

Jehoram was sick at home in his palace, suffering from his wounds.

Elisha appointed a young man to go to Ramoth-gilead. One who could run fast, and not be alarmed at the sight of armies, was chosen.

When the young prophet arrived at the city he found that the Syrians had gone away, and that the Israelites were keeping the city.

There was a room over the gateway in which the chief captains used to sit to consult together about plans of fighting.

Jehu seems to have been the chief captain.

When the prophet saw the captains he knew

which was Jehu, and he said to him, 'I have a word for thee, O Captain.'

Jehu did not know the prophet meant him, and he asked, 'To which of all of us?'

'To thee, O Captain.'

The captain went with the prophet into an inner room.

Then the young prophet poured oil on the captain's head, and said, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab, that I may avenge the blood of my servants. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in Jezreel (even in Naboth's vineyard), and there shall be none to bury her.'

Having said all this, the young prophet opened the door and fled.

You see the chief crime of Ahab had been killing the prophets.

The punishment had not come in Ahab's time, because he had humbled himself; but it was coming now upon his children. The worst punishment of all was to come upon Jezebel, for not only her blood would be licked by dogs, but her flesh would be eaten by dogs. She was the worst of the whole family.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE DEATH OF JEHORAM AND REIGN OF JEHU.

(2 KINGS, ix. 11–26.)

WHEN the prophet had fled, Jehu returned to the other captains, sitting in the room over the gateway.

These captains were very curious to know what the messenger had said, and they asked Jehu, 'Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to thee?'

They thought him mad, because his manner had been so strange and hurried.

Jehu thought that the captains might guess what the prophet had come for, and he said, 'You know him, and what he came for.'

'No,' said they, 'we do not. Do tell us.'

Then he told them, and said,—

'Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.'

The captains were quite willing to have Jehu for their king, and they were ready to follow him to the king's palace.

They took their garments on their arms, ready for running, and they stood at the top of the gateway-stairs, where every one could see them; and they blew trumpets, saying, 'Jehu is king.'

The first thing to be done was to prevent people leaving the city and running to Jezreel, to tell the king.

So Jehu said to his captains, 'Do you not think it would be well to prevent any one going out of this city to tell the news in Jezreel?

The captains thought it would be well to shut the gates and prevent people escaping.

Jehu himself rode in a chariot, and his chief men came after him. He had a long way to go—more than forty miles. He crossed the river Jordan. At last he came within sight of Jezreel. There—king Jehoram lay ill of his wounds. A watchman stood on the tower of Jezreel. He saw a company of soldiers coming; but they were too far off for him to tell who they were.

He called out loud, 'I see a company!'

When Jehoram heard of this, he said, 'Send a man on horseback to meet the company, and let him say, Is it peace?'

Jehoram must have wanted to know whether there was peace between Israel and Syria; for if he had thought that the company was coming to fight, he would not have sent *one* horseman only, but a great many horsemen to meet them.

One horseman went out to meet Jehu, and cried, 'Thus saith the king, Is it peace?'

Jehu answered him, 'What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me.'

The watchman went on looking, and cried out,

'The messenger came to them, but he is not coming back.'

Then Jehoram desired that another man should be sent. He sent *one* only, for he still suspected no danger.

The same question as the first horseman asked was repeated, 'Is it peace?' (meaning with Syria.)

The same answer from Jehu, 'What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me.'

This time the watchman saw more clearly. 'The messenger came to them, and cometh not again. The driving is like the driving of Jehu, for he driveth furiously.'

How was it the watchman knew Jehu's driving so well?

Jehu had been at Jezreel before. Fifteen years ago he had followed Ahab, as he drove to Naboth's vineyard.

When Jehoram heard that it was Jehu, he was not frightened, for he thought Jehu had conquered the Syrians, and had come in haste to tell him.

Jehoram ordered his chariot to be got ready, for his wounds were now well enough for him to go out.

There was staying with him—his nephew, the king of Judah, and this nephew had come to see him while ill of his wounds.

This nephew was named Ahaziah. He accompanied his uncle Jehoram in going to meet Jehu.

They were driving out of the city when they met Jehu, just at the place once called Naboth's vineyard, and which was now the king's garden of herbs.

Close by this spot the kings met. When Jehoram saw Jehu he cried out, 'Is it peace?' (that is with Syria.)

Jehu replied, 'What peace can there be while thy mother Jezebel worships idols so much, and uses so much witchcraft?'

By this answer Jehoram saw that Jehu was come as an enemy, so with his hands he turned his horses round and galloped towards the city. He cried out to his nephew Ahaziah, 'There is deceit' (or treachery). Jehu was just behind Jehoram, and he took an arrow, and standing in his chariot, he shot from his bow with all his strength. The arrow went into Jehoram's back between the shoulders and came out at his heart. The king sank down dead in his chariot.

Then Jehu said to one of his captains, named Bidkar, 'Take up and cast him into the land of Naboth the Jezreelite.'

'Don't you remember how, when we rode together after Ahab, that the Lord sent him this message: Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth and his sons, and I will punish thee on this piece of land? Now therefore take him and cast him into the plat of ground, as the Lord said.'

We know what became of his blood. The dogs licked it up.

Though *Ahab's* blood was not licked up by dogs of Jezreel (but by dogs of Samaria), yet Jehoram's blood was; for Jehoram had the same blood as his father Ahab.

Thus the Lord remembers to punish sin.

Jehoram was not as wicked as his father; yet he was punished for his father's sins as well as for his own. God does not punish good children for their fathers' sins, for He has said, 'If a man see all his father's sins which he hath done, and *considereth* and doeth *not* such like, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live.' (Ezek. xviii. 14, 18, 20.)

But Jehoram walked in most of his father's ways, and would have killed Elisha if he could; even as Ahab would have killed Elijah.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHU.

(2 KINGS, ix. 30 to the end.)

AND what became of Jehoram's nephew Ahaziah?

When he saw that his uncle had been shot,

he drove off in his chariot as quickly as possible by the way of the garden-house, for he was close to his uncle's garden. But Jehu soon overtook him, and desired his servants to kill him in his chariot. Jehu's servants shot at him, but did not quite kill him. Ahaziah's own servants went on with their master in the chariot to Megiddo, about ten miles off. There Ahaziah died.

This Ahaziah was king of Judah. He would not have been killed had he stayed at Jerusalem, instead of going to see his uncle at Jezreel. It was wrong of him to go there, because his uncle was a worshipper of idols and a murderer of prophets. His blood was not licked by dogs, for his servants carried his dead body in his chariot to Jerusalem. There it was buried in the tomb of David, as Ahaziah belonged to the family of David.

The worst of all the royal family of Israel was now living in Jezreel.

Jezebel was the next person to be slain.

Jehu drove to her palace.

She had heard he was coming, and she had spent her time in painting her face, and in dressing her hair. She had put black around her eyes, to make them look darker and brighter. She wanted to make Jehu admire her grandeur, for she was a vain old woman.

She saw Jehu driving his chariot through the gate, and she called out,—

2 KINGS, IX. 31–2.

'And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who?'—P. 149.

'Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?'

She hoped that Jehu would be afraid to kill her, for Zimri, who had slain Elah, burned himself up in his palace, a week after. Zimri did a wicked thing when he killed Elah; but Jehu was commanded to kill Jezebel.

So he said to the servants who were with Jezebel, 'Who is on my side? Who?'

Then two or three servants looked out of the window.

'Throw her down!' cried Jehu.

Would they throw down their mistress and their queen?

Yes, they would; they threw her down.

The wretched queen fell between the wall of the house and the horses of Jehu, and her blood was sprinkled on the walls and the horses. She may have died from the fall, but if not dead when she fell, she was killed the moment after by Jehu's horses trampling upon her.

Jehu then went into the palace and sat down to dinner. It may be in the very room that Jezebel had been going to dine that he dined.

While he was eating—he thought of Jezebel's body at the gate, and he said to his servants,—

'Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter.'

She was the daughter of the king of Zidon.

But why did Jehu intend to bury her? Had not God said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel, and there shall be none to bury her?'

Surely Jehu must have forgotten this. But God did not forget His own word, for the servants found nothing near the gate but a few bones — the skull, the hands, and feet of Jezebel.

They came in and told Jehu what they had seen.

He was much struck by hearing of it, and he remembered the words Elijah had said to Ahab about fourteen years ago. He repeated them before all. 'This is what God said by Elijah: In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel, and her body shall be as dung, so that none shall say, This is Jezebel.'

She was about fifty years old when she died. Who can say how many prophets she had killed, and how much precious blood she had spilt!

CHAPTER LXIII.

DEATH OF AHAB'S SONS,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHU.

(2 Kings, x. 1–11.)

Jehu had not yet finished his bloody task, though he had killed the king and his mother. There were Jehoram's brothers to be killed, and their children also.

Ahab had left a great many children. His children were all more than fourteen years old, for he had died fourteen years ago. But Ahab had grandchildren also. Altogether Ahab's children and grandchildren were seventy in number. What a great number!

They lived in a house in Samaria. Jehu was now in Jezreel, thirty miles off. Jehu did not go himself to kill the children. If it had been known that he was coming, surely the seventy sons would have run away.

There were men who had the care of this large family. Jehu wrote a letter to them, and sent the letter by men on horseback.

When the letter came, the guardians who had the care of the children opened it, and read thus:—

'Your master's sons are with you, and you have chariots, and horses, and walls, and armour; set the best of your master's sons on the throne, and fight for him.'

Did Jehu mean the men to do this? No; he knew they would be afraid to do it;—and so they were.

They said to one another, 'Has not Jehu overcome two kings (Israel and Judah), how then shall *we* be able to stand against him?'

Therefore all the chief people of Samaria wrote back to say, 'We are thy servants; we will do all that thou shalt bid us. We will not make any one king.'

Jehu answered this letter, saying, 'Take the

heads of your master's sons, and come to me at Jezreel by to-morrow.'

When this letter came, what did the guardians say? Could they make up their minds to kill the youths they had brought up?'

Yes: they slew them all by cutting off their heads, and they put these heads in baskets, and sent them in the night to Jezreel.

A messenger told Jehu in the night that the heads were come.

Jehu desired that the heads might be laid in two heaps on each side of the city gate.

In the morning he went and stood at the gate, and, pointing to the two heaps, he said, 'Behold, *I* slew my master, but *who* slew all these?'

And who had slain them? It was SIN; the sin of Ahab in worshipping idols and killing prophets. To punish Ahab's sin these young men had died.

Jehu then said, 'ALL that the Lord spoke by Elijah shall be fulfilled.'

Jehu had not yet slain *all* Ahab's family. There were Jehoram's own little children still living. Soon he slew them all; and he slew all Jehoram's friends, and all the priests of the idols, till there were none left in Jezreel.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE FORTY-TWO PRINCES,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHU.

(2 KINGS, x. 12–17.)

AHAB'S seventy sons and grandsons had been killed in Samaria. But there were more of Ahab's relations living there, and Jehu determined to go to Samaria and destroy them all.

The distance between Jezreel and Samaria was about fifteen miles.

Jehu set out in his chariot, followed by his numerous servants. On the way he met a large party of young travellers. They were persons of high rank. Probably they were splendidly dressed. They must have been riding on asses or horses, for they came from Jerusalem, sixty miles off.

Who were they?

The cousins of Ahaziah, king of Judah, and relations to Jehoram, so lately dead.*

They little knew what had happened, for all had been done so quickly that the news had not reached Jerusalem.

Jehu stopped his chariot to speak to the royal

* All Ahaziah's brothers had been slain by the Arabians, so these young people were not his brothers.—2 Chron. xxi. 17.

family. No doubt they looked happy, and pleased with their journey.

'Who are ye?' said Jehu.

'We are the relations of Ahaziah, and we are going down to see the children of King Jehoram and his queen.'

They knew that Jehoram had been wounded, but they did not think so much of seeing him as of seeing his children—their cousins.

Suddenly Jehu called to his servants, 'Take them alive;' and they took them alive.

There was a large place where sheep were often shorn, called a shearing-house. It was close to the road. The young princes were dragged into this house to be killed. There was a pit in the shearing-house. In this pit the princes were slain. Probably their dead bodies were left in that dark place.

Their death came from their going down to visit their wicked relations. They belonged to the family of Ahab, and worshipped idols as he did; but if they had stayed at Jerusalem they would not have been killed.

Leaving this bloody scene, Jehu went on towards Samaria.

On his way he met a very good man. He was not an Israelite, yet he worshipped the God of Israel.

Have you forgotten Jethro? Who was he? The father-in-law of Moses. He was not an Israelite, but a Midianite.

His children had followed Moses through the wilderness, and had entered Canaan. They had lived there ever since, and were called Kenites.

It was one of these people that Jehu met.

His name was Je-hon-a-dab.

Jehu thought that this good man would be a help to him. He stopped his chariot, and asked him, 'Is your heart with my heart?'

Jehonadab said, 'It is.'

Then they took each other by the hand, as a sign they were of one heart. Jehu wanted Jehonadab to ride in his chariot with him; and he pressed him to get up, saying, 'Come with me, and I will show you my zeal for the Lord.'

Do you like that speech? Was it not a proud speech? It is not well to want people to see what good things we do.

Jehu entered Samaria with his good friend sitting beside him.

There were many in Samaria ready to receive Jehu as their king. Those bringers-up of Ahab's children were ready to obey Jehu in everything.

Jehu searched for all the relations of Ahab still living, and he caused them all to be killed, till the whole family was destroyed, as God had said, 'The whole house of Ahab shall perish.'

CHAPTER LXV.

THE HOUSE OF BAAL,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHU.

(2 KINGS, x. 17–31.)

JEHU entered Samaria with good Jehonadab sitting beside him in his chariot. You have heard what his first work was. It was to kill all that remained of Ahab's family. Ahab's children were already destroyed, but there were other relatives still living. All these fell in the city. Then was fulfilled the word of the Lord, 'Him that dieth of Ahab in the city shall the dogs eat.'

Now you will hear what will surprise you.

Jehu gathered all the people together, and said, 'Ahab served Baal a *little*, but Jehu shall serve him *much*.'

Who would have thought that Jehu would turn to idols, after killing so many idolaters?

Jehu desired that all the worshippers of Baal should come. 'Any who do not come shall be killed.'

Then Jehu appointed a day for a great sacrifice to Baal, and he sent men to make known the day.

The messengers went through all the tribes of Israel, but they did not go to Judah.

All the worshippers of Baal came; not one

was missing. Baal's house was quite filled from one end to the other.

There was a room in this temple called a vestry. It contained vestments or clothes for the men to put on before they worshipped Baal. These garments were brought out, and they were worn by the whole assembly.

Jehu came to Baal's temple accompanied by his friend Jehonadab. They said to the crowd, 'Look and see whether there are any of the servants of the Lord among you.' They looked, and they said there was not one, but only the worshippers of Baal. Then the great sacrifice to Baal was offered up.

Suddenly eighty soldiers with swords rushed in among them, and slew every one in the temple. They took care that no one should escape.

Who do you think had commanded the soldiers to rush in?

It was Jehu himself. He did not really wish to worship Baal; he only pretended that he did, in order that he might get all the worshippers together, to kill them.

Was this a good and honest plan?

No, it was like one of Satan's plans. Elijah had acted in an open, manly way, when he wanted to get Baal's worshippers together.

Deceit is always wrong, and it comes from the devil. It is a pity that such a good man as Jehonadab joined in the plan.

The bodies of all these worshippers of Baal were cast out to be eaten by dogs.

Next the soldiers burned the images of Baal, and broke down a very great image, and destroyed the temple of Baal also.

Perhaps you wonder there were so many images, as Jehoram had broken those his father had made. But Jezebel had gone on worshipping her image, and many had followed the queen's religion.

Now the house of Baal was a heap of ruins, and all the rubbish of the city was thrown among the broken walls and images.

From this time Baal was no more worshipped publicly in Israel. Thus Jehu had done the Lord's work, though not always in a good and righteous way.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE DEATH OF JEHU.

(2 KINGS, x. 30 to end.)

WHO would have thought that Jehu himself would worship idols?

He did not worship Baal, but he worshipped the two golden calves. God was angry with him on this account.

But God approved his destroying the family of Ahab, and promised to reward him for

his obedience in that matter. He said to him, 'Thou hast done well in performing what was right in mine eyes, and in doing to Ahab's family what was in my heart. Therefore thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.'

This was a promise that Jehu's son, and his grandson, and his great grandson, and his great great grandson, should be kings after him.

If Jehu had been truly good, God would have let his children go on being kings much longer.

Jehu was not a faithful servant of the Lord, yet he got a reward for what he did right.

Was Jehu grateful to God for promising him a reward? Not at all. He went on worshipping the calves, and disobeying God's laws; for he did not serve God with his heart, even when he seemed to do right.

The Lord punished him by letting Hazael
me against Israel, and smite the people who
co
ed beyond Jordan.
liv
Elisha had told Hazael a long while before
ho
w cruelly he would treat the Israelites.

Do you remember how Elisha wept at the thought, and how he said, 'I know the evil that thou wilt do to the children of Israel, and how thou wilt slay their young men, and dash their children against the stones!'

Elisha lived to see the words fulfilled, and he must have wept again when he heard of these bloody deeds.

Jehu had a very long reign—twenty-eight years. Then he died, and was buried in Samaria.

He did not die in a miserable manner, like some of the kings, nor was his blood licked by dogs; but his body was treated with honour.

Yet he died in his sins.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ.

(2 KINGS, xiii. 1–9.)

GOD had declared that Jehu's son should reign after him, and he *did* reign. His name was Jeho-ahaz. He behaved just like his father; he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.

The Lord punished him as He had punished his father. Hazael, king of Syria, was continually attacking him. He took a great number of Israelites prisoners, and he made them his slaves.

Now Jehoahaz in his affliction called earnestly on the Lord to deliver him.

Did the Lord hear his prayers? Yes, He did; for sometimes He hears the prayers of wicked men, to show them how merciful He is.

More than this—the Lord pitied His poor people under their cruel conquerors, and He

raised up a saviour or captain, who delivered the poor captive Israelites, so that they went back to their tents. Did the Israelites now turn to the Lord? No, they still worshipped the calves, and they worshipped Baal in a grove at Samaria.

Jehoahaz could not fight more battles against Syria, for his army was become very small. There were only ten thousand soldiers, fifty horsemen, and ten chariots.

Jehoahaz reigned seventeen years, and was buried in Samaria, where his father was buried. He left his people in a miserable state—like chaff when the wheat is threshed.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE REIGN OF JOASH AND THE DEATH OF ELISHA.

(2 KINGS, xiii. 14–22.)

THE grandson of Jehu was now king; his name was Joash.

And where was Elisha? He was still alive.

He had been a prophet sixty or seventy years at least. He was first called to be a prophet in the reign of Ahab, though we do not know in what year of his reign. Elisha had prophesied during the two years of Ahaziah's reign,

the twelve years of Jehoram's reign, the twenty-eight years of Jehu's reign, the seventeen years of Jehoahaz's reign—those numbers put together, make nearly sixty years. We must add to that number some years of Ahab's reign—perhaps ten—and these would mount up to seventy years. If he was thirty when he began to be a prophet, he must now have been about a hundred.

He had often been despised in his youth, even by little children; but in his old age he was honoured by the king himself.

It often happens that people who have served God all their lives are much honoured when they are old.

King Joash heard that Elisha was very sick, and he came to see him. This was kind. When he saw the old prophet on his bed, he wept over him, and cried out, 'O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.' These were the very words that Elisha had uttered when Elijah had gone up to heaven. Perhaps Joash had heard that Elisha had used these words, and so he used them too.

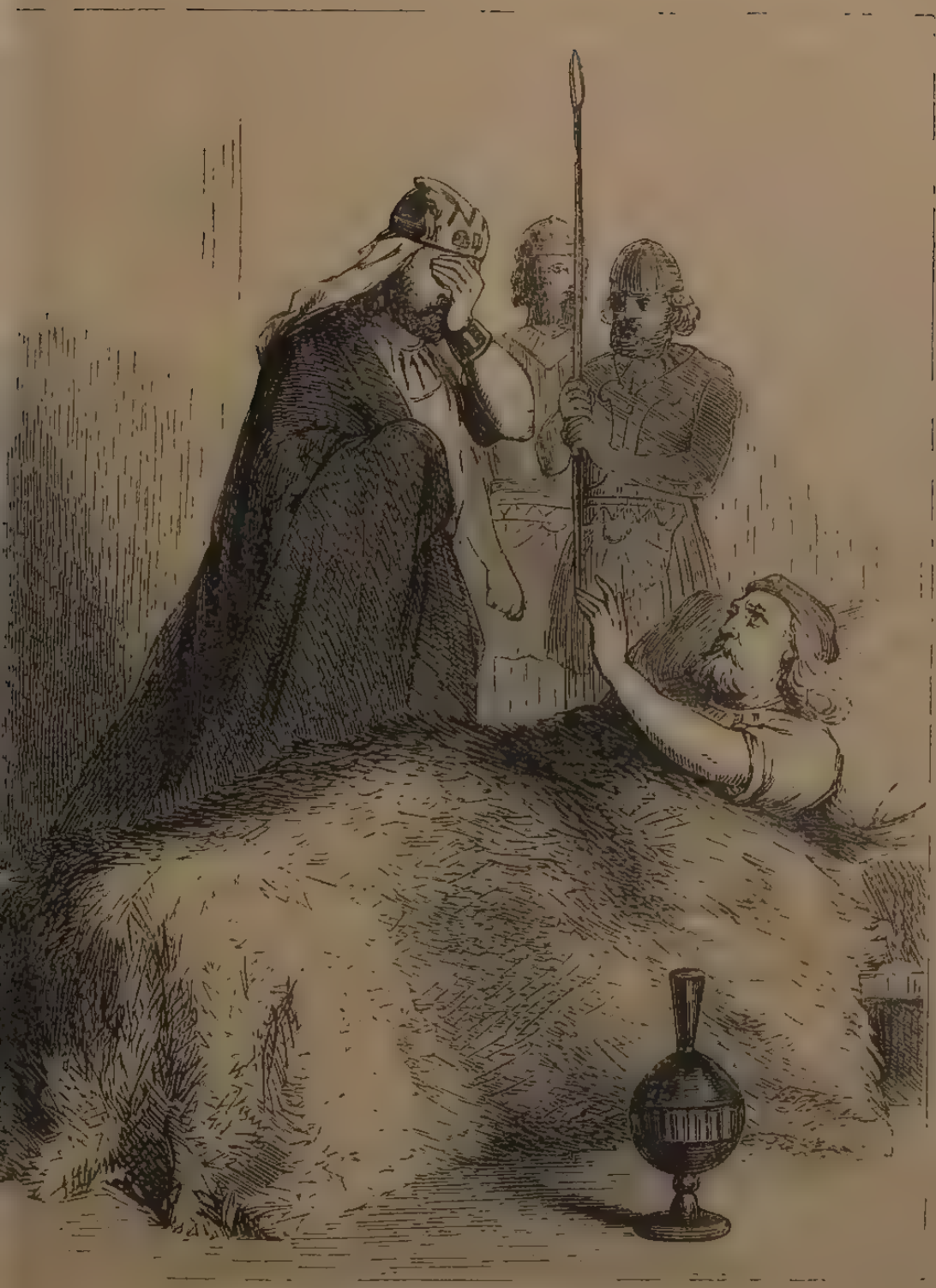
The meaning of them was, that the prophet defended Israel more than a great army.

Elisha knew that Joash was thinking of what would become of Israel when he was dead.

So Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and arrows.'

And he took a bow and arrows.

Then Elisha said, 'Put thy hand upon the bow.'



2 Kings, xiii. 14.
The Death of Elisha.—P. 162.

And Joash put his hand upon the bow, and Elisha put his hand upon the king's hands.

Elisha said, 'Open the window eastward.'

And he opened it.

Then Elisha said, 'Shoot.'

And Joash shot.

And Elisha told him that the shooting of the arrows was a sign of victories over the Syrians. And Elisha said, 'Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek till thou have consumed them.'

Now Joash knew that smiting with arrows meant victories over the Syrians.

Having taught him this, the old prophet went on to try his faith. He said to him, 'Take the arrows.' And Joash took them, and Elisha said, 'Smite upon the ground.'

And Joash smote three times, and he smote no more.

Then Elisha was angry, and said, 'Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; but now thou shalt smite Syria only three times.'

Joash ought to have believed that the more times he smote on the ground the more victories he should have; but he did not believe.

Elisha, though just going to die, was angry at unbelief, for God is angry at it. 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'

Elisha died and was buried in a large tomb.

No doubt he had an honourable funeral, as the king respected him.

About a year afterwards some men were carrying a dead body to a grave they had prepared. We do not know who the dead man was.

Suddenly a little band of soldiers appeared. They were not Syrian soldiers, but Moabite soldiers.

The bearers of the dead body were frightened. They could run away; but what could they do with the body of their dead friend? They said, 'There is Elisha's tomb; let us hide it there for a little while.'

There lay Elisha's bones, not in a coffin (for people did not have coffins then), but on the ground. The bearers let down their dead body into the tomb, till it touched the bones of Elisha beneath. No sooner did it touch those bones than the dead body came to life, and stood upon its feet.

How astonished the bearers must have been! Now they could all run away from the enemies; even the man once dead could run now.

Thus God showed how precious were the dead bones of Elisha. He showed us also that Elisha was like Jesus, who died and was buried, and who will bring to life one day all who have died and been buried. 'All that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.'—John, v. 28.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE PROPHET IN THE SHIP,

IN THE REIGN OF JOASH.

(JONAH, i. 1–6.)

GOD had taken Elisha to his rest, but there were several holy prophets still living.

One of these has written part of his own history by the Spirit of God, confessing his own sins, and describing his own punishments.

Other prophets have written God's messages, but this man alone has written an account of his own disobedient conduct.

This man is Jonah.

We cannot tell exactly when he lived. It may have been in the reign of Jehoahaz, or it may have been in the reign of Joash.

Before we speak more of him, we must speak of the greatest kingdom and of the greatest city in the world.

Syria was a small kingdom, and Damascus was a small city.

There was another kingdom far away, very large indeed. Its name was Assyria. Its chief city was Nineveh, the largest city in the world. It was so large that a man would walk sixty miles if he were to walk round it. It had walls a hundred feet high.

Nineveh was built on the Tigris.

You see in the map two great rivers. They are called Euphrates and Tigris. The land between them is called Mesopotamia, whence Abram came.

Nineveh was built on the Tigris, a great way from the sea.

It is supposed that there were a million people in the city.

But who can describe its wickedness? God called it the bloody city, full of lies and robbery.*

It was also full of images and of witches, and the Lord said to it, 'Thou art vile.'

The Lord was so merciful as to send a prophet to this city, for our God desires that all men should be saved.

You know what prophet He sent. It was Jonah. He belonged to a city in Galilee, called Gath-hepher. It is in the tribe of Zebulun, very near Cana and Nazareth.

God said to Jonah,—

'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.'

It was very unpleasant to go with such a message to a great city. Who could tell whether the king of Nineveh would not kill one who brought such a message?

Jonah would not go. He determined to get

* Nahum, iii. 1.

away from God; but *that* is impossible, for 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' Yet Jonah tried to get out of the Lord's sight.

Instead of going northwards to Nineveh, he went southwards, till he came to a place by the sea, called Joppa.

He had to go seventy miles before he reached this town. It was a port where ships set out on voyages. Jonah found a ship ready to sail. The ship was going to a city in Spain, called Tarshish.

There was much money to be paid for a man to be taken such a distance, all across the Mediterranean Sea. Jonah paid the fare. He felt he should soon be out of God's land, and be brought to a heathen land.

But he never reached that heathen land, for the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a great tempest in the sea, so that there was danger of the ship being destroyed.

Was Jonah frightened? No. You shall soon hear why he was not afraid.

The sailors were much afraid, and they all began to pray, each man calling upon his own god for help; for they were heathen sailors, and had many different gods.

A ship in a storm, if it is light, is less likely to sink than if it is heavy. So the sailors made their ship lighter by casting out the things in it.

But why was not Jonah afraid? Because he was asleep. He had gone down under the deck, and had fallen fast asleep. He must have been tired with his long journey to Joppa.

The master of the ship came to him and awoke him, saying,—

'O sleeper, arise. Call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.'

Jonah must have felt ashamed at a heathen telling him to pray. The master did not know who Jonah was, but he felt sure he must have some god.

Did Jonah then begin to pray? How could Jonah pray to the God he was running away from?

Children, can you pray when you are doing very naughty things, and not wishing to be good? Oh no; sin cuts you off from God.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE PROPHET IN THE SEA,

IN THE REIGN OF JOASH.

(JONAH, i. 7–16.)

WHEN Jonah came among the sailors, he heard them say that they thought there must be some

very wicked person on board. They said that the gods must have sent the storm to punish that wicked person. They did not know that Jonah was acting wickedly.

The sailors said to one another, 'Let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account the storm has arisen.'

They cast lots. There was one lot which, if a person drew, would show him to be the guilty one. This lot fell upon Jonah.

You see God was near Jonah still, and caused his sin to be found out. How must Jonah have felt now?

The sailors began to ask him a great many questions. They wanted to know what he had done, and he told them the truth, that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord.

They said, 'What is thine occupation? where do you come from? what is thy country? and who are thy people?'

He answered, 'I am an Hebrew.' (Abram was an Hebrew, and therefore all the Israelites were Hebrews.)

Then Jonah made this noble speech,—'I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.'

By saying this—Jonah showed that his God was the *only* God, for He had made *everything*—heaven, sea, and land—so that the gods of the sailors were false gods.

The sailors began to believe in Jonah's God.

They said to Jonah, 'Why did you flee from your God?'

Jonah could make no answer; he knew he had been very wicked. The sea went on roaring and tossing. The sailors knew now that it was on Jonah's account it raged. So they asked Jonah, 'What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?'

Jonah answered, 'Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that it is for my sake this great tempest is upon you.'

It was right of Jonah to be willing that the sailors should throw him into the sea. But those men did not like to throw him overboard, and 'they rowed hard to bring the ship to land;' but they could not, for the storm continued to rage.

Now they saw they *must* cast him out; but before they did so they prayed unto the Lord to forgive them. They did not pray to their own false gods, but to the only true God. They prayed very earnestly, 'O Lord, we beseech Thee; we beseech Thee.'

Then they took up Jonah and cast him into the sea. Jonah must have felt as he was falling over how much better it would have been if he had obeyed the Lord and gone to Nineveh. Be sure, dear children, we shall always find that disobedience brings us into misery.

As soon as Jonah was in the sea it became

calm. Then the men saw that the God of Israel was the true God, and they feared Him exceedingly, and offered up a sacrifice to Him, and made vows or promises to serve Him.

It may be that these men continued to fear the Lord, and found mercy.

Is there anything in Jonah's history that puts you in mind of the Lord Jesus? Not his disobedience; *that* does not remind us of Jesus. But this does remind us: by Jonah being cast into the sea the men in the ship were saved from death, and by Jesus being brought to the grave the souls who believe in Him are saved from eternal death.

His life was given for our lives.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE PROPHET IN THE FISH,

IN THE REIGN OF JOASH.

JONAH, i. 17; ii.

DID Jonah perish in the mighty waters?

Though these waters were now calm, yet he must soon have perished, had not God prepared a refuge for him. It was the most wonderful place for a man to be in. It was a fish—a very great fish.

This whale (or great fish) swallowed up Jonah.*

There was a place inside the fish where Jonah could breathe, though it was dark and damp. No man would like to be in such a prison. Here Jonah thought upon his sins. He knew that he was now being punished for his disobedience.

He said in his prayer, 'I am cast out of Thy sight; yet will I look again towards Thy holy temple.' He meant that holy temple in Jerusalem, where all the good prophets worshipped, even if they lived in Galilee. We know that temple was like Jesus, to whom we must look to be saved.

Then Jonah vowed that if he were delivered he would sacrifice to the Lord, and give Him thanks. Yet for three days and three nights he remained in his horrible cell: he felt that he was passing through the deep sea, and that its waves were rolling above him, while sea-weeds were wrapped round his head. Sometimes he went down very low, even to the bottom of the mountains (for there are mountains in the sea); but he felt the most troubled when he thought of God: he even fainted when he remembered the Lord.

* It has been said that whales are only found in the Northern Seas; but some sorts of whales have been found in the Mediterranean Seas. The word translated 'whale,' signifies any large fish. There are fishes who have an air-chamber in the throat, and who have the power of expelling the air when they wish to descend, and who have the power of imbibing air (to make themselves lighter) when they wish to ascend.

The Lord heard Jonah's prayer, and on the third day he made the fish cast him out upon the sea-shore, we know not at what place. It is probable that some people saw the fish cast out Jonah. This great miracle showed Jonah to be a true prophet and a servant of the Lord.

After his deliverance Jonah paid the vows that he had vowed. He went to God's holy temple to offer sacrifices, and he never went to worship the golden calves. He wrote a song about his misery in the fish. In this song he said, 'Those who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.' 'Lying vanities' mean idols, such as the calves, and 'their own mercy, means 'God.'

Jesus lay for three days and nights in the tomb, and was brought to life again, just as Jonah lay three days and three nights in the whale's belly, and then was set free by the power of God.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE PROPHET IN THE CITY,

IN THE REIGN OF JOASH.

JONAH, iii.

JONAH could not tell whether the Lord would let him still be a prophet, or whether He would cast him off for his disobedience. At last the word came to him again from the Lord, 'Arise, go

unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach what I bid thee.' This time Jonah obeyed and set out. The journey to Nineveh was five hundred miles. It must have taken Jonah nearly a month to walk there.

In his journey he crossed the river Euphrates, and then went towards the north, till he reached a vast plain.

The great river Tigris flowed through this plain. Here Nineveh was seen, with her walls a hundred feet high and her towers of two hundred feet — the largest city in the world.

As soon as Jonah arrived — he went into the midst of the city, and preached what God had told him, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'

And did the people believe this prophecy?

Yes, they did. This was wonderful, for the people before the flood would not believe Noah when he foretold the flood, and the people of Sodom would not believe Lot when he foretold the fire.

But the people of Nineveh did not mock Jonah, nor were they angry with him, but they believed, from the least poor child to the great king, who sat upon the most splendid throne in the world. That king (whose name we do not know) laid aside his royal robes, and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He and his nobles gave this command: 'Let neither man nor beast taste anything: let them not feed nor drink

water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry unto God mightily.'

If you ask, how could the beasts cry unto God? I answer, would they not cry when they had no food and no water? And would not God hear them and pity them?

The king's commandment went on to say, 'Let every one turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.'

The violence spoken of was cruelty to the poor — taking away their things, and making them work hard as slaves.

The fasting would be of no use if the men of Nineveh did not turn from their sins.

God had not told the men of Nineveh that He would spare them if they should repent. He had said only that they should be destroyed. But the king of Nineveh thought that God was kind and good, and he said to his people, 'Who can tell if God will not turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not?' The king was right in saying, 'Who can tell?' for God did turn away His anger. He heard the prayers of the people, and He saw their works—that they turned from their evil way; and so He did not destroy the city, as He had said.

God would always spare sinners if they truly repented; because His dear Son has shed His blood for them all. It was for Jesus' sake that God spared the city, because Jesus had promised to die upon the tree.

Dear children, when you have sinned, always believe that God will pardon and not punish you, if you call upon Him in the name of Jesus.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE PROPHET IN THE BOOTH,

IN THE REIGN OF JOASH.

(JONAH, iv.)

WAS Jonah glad that God had spared Nineveh?

No — he was angry.

What could be the reason?

I suppose that he thought he should be despised because his word did not come true. This was very selfish. He thought only of *himself*, and did not feel for those thousands of people in the great city.

In the midst of his anger he prayed. Generally people do not pray when they are angry. But Jonah did not pray a good prayer. He said, 'I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country?' Was that a prayer? And what was his saying that he speaks of? The saying was, that he knew that God would spare Nineveh, for he knew that God was gracious. This had been his reason for going the other way. But though so angry he gives a lovely account of what God is :—

'For I knew that Thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.'

Ought not Jonah to have loved such a God and obeyed His commandments?

Jonah was so much vexed with God that he made this sinful prayer:

'Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.'

It would not have been well for Jonah to die in his wicked state of mind.

The Lord gave a gentle answer to Jonah's angry prayer. He said, 'Doest thou well to be angry?'

But Jonah continued to be angry.

Instead of going home, he went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and made him a booth of boughs of trees, and sat there in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

It seems that he hoped God would do some harm to the city. He was like Satan as he sat watching in his booth. How different he was from Jesus, who looked down upon Jerusalem, and wept over it, because it was to be destroyed! Why did not Jonah go, and teach the men of Nineveh about his God? This is what Elisha would have done.

But there he sat in his ill-humour and horrible temper.

God determined to show him his sin by something He was going to do.

God prepared a gourd — a climbing plant with large leaves. This gourd came up in one night over Jonah's booth: God made the plant grow so very quickly.

In the morning Jonah was surprised to find this leafy shelter over his booth. He was now exceeding glad, because he had got something to please himself. Yet he could not be truly happy, for his heart was full of malice.

He enjoyed the cool shade for one day. The next day he found his gourd withered and dead. For God had prepared a worm to destroy the plant in the night. All that God prepared for Jonah was wonderful — the fish, the gourd, and the worm.

Then God prepared another thing, — a fierce wind, that blew from the east, and was burning hot. As there was no shade now, the sun beat upon Jonah's head till he fainted. Thus Jonah showed he could not bear heat himself; why did he wish the people of Nineveh to be burned up?

Again the selfish man wished to die, and said a second time, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' The Lord answered, 'Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?'

Then the Lord talked to him, and showed him his sin.

'Thou hast had pity on the gourd, though

thou didst not plant it, nor make it grow. It came up in a night, and perished in a night: 'and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, in which there are one hundred and twenty thousand who know not which is their right hand and which is their left; and where also there is much cattle?'

Who were those persons who knew not their right hand from their left?

Little children under five.*

You see how much God pities children, and even poor animals, such as sheep, cows, and horses.

Was Jonah ashamed of his sin? And did he now repent? Yes, he must have done so; though he does not tell us: but he wrote this history by the Holy Spirit. People do not like to confess their sins before many; but Jonah confessed his sins when he wrote this book for everybody to hear.

If we look into our hearts we shall find we are too much like Jonah — proud, disobedient, selfish, and unkind. The Lord changed his heart by the Holy Spirit, or he could not have written this book, and the Lord can change ours, and make us loving like Jesus.

* It is calculated that the eighth part of the population is under five years of age. Therefore there must have been nearly a million people in Nineveh.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

DEATH OF JOASH.

(2 KINGS, xiii. 11, 22 to end.)

WHILE Jonah was preaching at Nineveh, Joash continued to reign in Samaria.

He must have heard of Jonah's visit to Nineveh, for the wonderful history of the fish was well known. Those who did not *see* the fish cast forth Jonah — yet they must have heard of the book that Jonah wrote by the Spirit of God. For that book became part of the Bible. But Joash did not repent of all his sins, but went on worshipping the golden calf.

He had much trouble during his reign. His father's enemy, the king of Syria, fought against him. This king of Syria was not Hazael, but his son Ben-hadad. Was it not strange that Hazael should call his son after the man he had suffocated with a cloth? but I suppose this young Ben-hadad was born *before* the old king was murdered, and Hazael may have called him Ben-hadad to please the old king.

Joash tried to get back the cities that the Syrians had once taken, and he did get them back. He got back Ramoth-gilead and all the others.

And why was he able to do this?

Because God gave him three victories — as Elisha had prophesied. He had struck the arrows three times on the ground, and so he gained three victories. He ought to have struck five or six times, and then he would have quite conquered Syria. But as it was, he did *not* conquer Syria.

He was not thankful to God for the victories, but walked in all the ways of Jeroboam. He knew what was right, because he had often been taught by old Elisha. He had wept over the prophet when he was dying, but he did not really love him, or he would not have spent his life in disobedience.

If you, dear children, have any old friend, or grandfather, who speaks to you about Jesus, do not forget their words when they are dead.

After a reign of sixteen years Joash died, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM THE SECOND.

THE KING'S CHAPEL.

(2 Kings, xiv. 23–27. Amos, vii. 1–9.)

When Joash was dead, his son reigned in his stead. His name was Jeroboam. Does this sur-

prise you? It well may. What! did Joash call his son after that detestable king who made Israel to sin? Good parents call their children after good men, and not after the wicked. No one would call his child Cain, or Judas: and Joash ought not to have called his son Jeroboam.

But the son of Joash soon showed that he loved the ways of Jeroboam: for he worshipped his calf.

He fought against the Syrians, as his father had done. There was a prophet who had foretold that he would conquer the Syrians. Who was this prophet? It was Jonah. He once lived at Gath-hepher, in Galilee, and he prophesied about Israel.

Perhaps he was dead now: but his words were not forgotten; nor the book that he had written.

God enabled Jeroboam to drive away the Syrians.

What was the Lord's reason for helping him? It was the Lord's own kindness and pity! He saw the sad state of Israel: how there was no one even shut up or hid, and that there was none left to help in the battles. And so the Lord would not blot out the name of Israel, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam.

There were some good prophets then living in the land, and they wrote down their words by the Spirit.

One of these prophets was named Amos.

He spoke much against the golden calf at Bethel.

This Amos was once a poor boy, and earned his bread by taking care of cattle and gathering wild fruit. One day as he was guarding his sheep and his cows, God said unto him, 'Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.'

Bethel was the place where he was to preach. That was a terrible place for preaching, for there the golden calf was set up.

Amos told the people wonderful visions that God showed him.

Once the Lord showed him a number of insects.*

Amos saw these insects eating up the grass that was left.† This grass was the grass that grew the second time in the year. Amos watched the locusts till they had eaten up all the grass in the fields. Now Amos knew that there would soon be a famine to punish Israel for their sins.

Then Amos prayed, 'O Lord, forgive, I beseech Thee.'

Then the Lord replied, 'It shall not be.'

You see how God answered the prayer of His holy prophet. What a blessing for a people when holy men pray for them! Their prayers save them from many evils, such as famine, and war, and pestilence.

* These insects are said in the text to be grasshoppers; but learned men believe that the word 'grasshoppers' means 'locusts.'

† The king claimed as his due the first mowings, but the people had the second mowings. Amos, vii. 1.

Then the Lord showed Amos a still greater wonder. It was a great fire—a wonderful fire, for it consumed part of the sea.

What did this fire signify?

The wrath of the Lord destroying Israel in all kinds of ways—by the sword, by storms, earthquakes, and pestilence.

Then Amos prayed again, 'O Lord God, leave off, I beseech Thee.'

The Lord replied, 'This shall not be.'

Then Amos saw a wall, and the Lord standing on it, letting down a plumb-line.

What is that? A string with a piece of lead at the end (for 'plumb' means 'lead').

Builders use a plumb-line that they may build their walls straight, as a string with a weight always falls straight. The wall was the likeness of Israel's conduct: and the plumb-line was the likeness of God's law. The conduct of Israel was like a crooked wall that did not agree with God's straight law.

God said to Amos, 'What seest thou?'

Amos said, 'A plumb-line.'

The Lord said, 'Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel; I will not look over their sins any more.'

Then the Lord threatened to send two punishments to Israel.

First, to destroy all their high places where they worshipped idols and built temples. All over the land there were such places.

Secondly, God said, 'I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

The time to punish that family was almost come: Jehu's son, Jehoahaz, was dead; his grandson, Joash, was dead: Jeroboam, his great-grandson, would soon die, and then would come his great-great-grandson; and he would be the fourth, and he would be the last of Jehu's family to sit upon the throne.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE DEATH OF JEROBOAM.

(AMOS, vii. 10 to end. 2 KINGS, xiv. 29.)

WHEN Amos prophesied at Bethel the king was not there. Though he often came to Bethel to worship, his chief palace was at Samaria.

There was one wicked man who always lived at Bethel. It was the priest of Bethel: his name was Amaziah.

He was very angry at hearing the visions of Amos, and he sent a message to king Jeroboam. This was the message: 'Amos has risen up against thee in the midst of Israel; for he has said, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be led away captive out of their own land."'

Was this message true?

Half was true and half was false. It was true that Amos had said that Israel should be led away captive; but it was false that Amos had said Jeroboam should die by the sword. Jeroboam would not die by the sword. Amos had said that Jeroboam's *family* should die by the sword.

After sending his false message Amaziah turned to Amos, and began to insult him:—

'Go, thou prophet! flee away into the land of Judah. Eat bread there, and prophesy there; but prophesy no more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.'

What was the king's chapel?

A chapel for the golden calf.

Amos answered the priest meekly, yet boldly. He told him why he was a prophet.

He said: 'I was no prophet, nor was I a prophet's son. I took care of sheep, and I gathered wild figs. And as I followed the flock the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel!' Then Amos added, 'Amaziah, hear the word of the Lord: Thy wife shall be a wanderer about the city, and thy children shall be killed, and thy land shall be taken away; and thou shalt die in a heathen land, and Israel shall be taken far away as captives.'

These were dreadful words for Amaziah to hear.

About twenty years afterwards they all came true.

Jeroboam reigned longer than any of the kings of Israel,—forty-one years. He gained many victories while he lived, and when he died he was buried with the other kings in Samaria.

But he lived and died an enemy to God.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE REIGN OF ZACHARIAH.

(2 KINGS, xv. 8–13.)

JEROBOAM the Second left a son called Zachariah. He was the last of Jehu's family who was to be king. He and all his brothers and children were to die by the sword, according to the prophecy of Amos.

Never were the people more wicked than at this time. They seem to have grown grey in wickedness.

There was an old prophet in Israel, named Hosea. He had been prophesying, like Amos, many years.

Now he called out to the inhabitants of the land, and said: 'By swearing, and lying, and stealing, they break out. They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense under oaks, and poplars, and elms. Hear the word of the Lord: "I will punish them for their ways."'*

* Hosea, iv. 2, 13, 9.

And how did the Lord punish them?

He punished them, first, by making their land full of confusion and fighting.

For a long while there was no king on the throne; and when Zachariah sat upon it he reigned only *six months.*

Then a man named Shallum suddenly attacked him, while all the people stood around, and killed him and became king.

The people did not kill Shallum for killing Zachariah, because most of them were on his side, and wished him to kill Zachariah.

Shallum, when he was king, killed all the brothers and all the children of Zachariah.

So the word of the Lord was fulfilled that Amos spoke: 'All the house of Jeroboam shall die by the sword.'

And so was fulfilled the word spoken to Jehu, many years before: 'Thy children of the fourth generation shall sit upon the throne.'

Four generations had sat upon the throne: Jehoahaz, son of Jehu; Joash, grandson; Jeroboam II. great-grandson: Zachariah, great-great-grandson.

Thus we see how true is the word of the Lord, and how what He says—He certainly will do.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

REIGNS OF SHALLUM AND MENAHEM.

(2 KINGS, XV. 13–23.)

1. SHALLUM.

VERY, very short was the reign of Shallum,—only *one month!*

He was himself a murderer, and another murderer slew him: that murderer was Menahem. He came from another city, and attacked Shallum in Samaria, and slew him, and sat upon his throne.

2. MENAHEM.

When Menahem was king, he tried to make all the cities submit to him; but some cities shut their gates against him.

However, Menahem, with his army, fought against those cities, and forced the people to let him in; and then terrible was the slaughter. Menahem in his fury slew even women and little babies.

How could he treat his own people with such cruelty!

But now the time was come for God to begin to bring Israel to an end. The Lord sent a dreadful enemy into the land.

The kings of Syria had often been enemies to Israel. But a greater king was ready to

come: it was the King of Assyria, the greatest kingdom in the world. The name of the king was Pul: he reigned in Nineveh, on the river Tigris. You remember how great that city was when Jonah preached there. The king who repented was now dead, and Pul reigned in his stead.

Menahem was frightened when Pul came. He knew it would be no use to fight against him: so he thought of a plan. He offered to give Pul an immense sum of money if he would be on his side, and help him to keep his kingdom; for many of the Israelites were against Menahem.

How could Menahem get this large sum of money?

He made his people pay the money to him; he made every rich man pay six pounds. He collected altogether a thousand talents of silver, which is equal in our money to three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds.

Many waggons drawn by oxen must have been needed to carry all this money to Assyria.

Pul was not satisfied with taking *silver* back to Nineveh; he took *men* also. He took captive a great many people who lived on the other side of Jordan.

You remember that two tribes and a half had settled there in the days of Joshua. These tribes were the first to be taken to Assyria. They were not *all* taken, but a great many.*

* 1 Chron. v. 23 to end.

And Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, must have been taken about this time; for Amos had declared from God that Amaziah would go to a polluted land and die there.

Menahem had not a very short reign,—ten years; but it was a reign full of trouble.

He died in his bed, and not by the sword, and he was buried.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

REIGNS OF PEKAHIAH AND PEKAH.

(2 KINGS, xv. 27–29; xvi. 5. 2 CHRON. xxviii. 2–15.)

1. PEKAHIAH.

As Menahem died in his bed, his son succeeded him on the throne.

His name was Pek-a-hiah.

He was like his father, and walked in the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin. He reigned only two years.

His short reign was ended by a dreadful event. He was in his palace in Samaria when one of his own captains, followed by fifty men, rushed in and murdered him.

2. PEKAH.

The name of the captain who killed Pekahiah was Pekah. He sat upon the throne of the murdered king, and reigned twenty years.

This Pekah was a very great warrior. He agreed with the King of Syria to go up against Jerusalem. This was a very wicked plan, because the men of Judah were of the same family as Israel. It was also very wicked to join with a heathen king in a war.

The king over Jerusalem was named Ahaz. When he heard that two kings were coming against him, he was very much frightened. His heart was moved like the trees of the wood in a storm, and so were his people's hearts.

A glorious prophet was sent to comfort him,—even Isaiah. But even Isaiah was not believed by the wicked King of Jerusalem. His words were despised.

So the Lord did not deliver Jerusalem from the enemies. The King of Syria fought and conquered, and carried away a great multitude of captives to Damascus.

The King of Israel, Pekah, did still more harm to Jerusalem. Pekah slew one hundred and twenty thousand men, who had forsaken the God of their fathers. He carried away captive two hundred thousand people : some were men, some women, and little children. They were taken to Samaria. A great quantity of clothes and other things were taken also.

Just as this great multitude were going to enter Samaria,—a prophet came up to them : his name was Oded. He called out to the army, 'Behold, because the Lord was angry with the

people of Judah, He hath delivered them into your hand ; and you have slain them with a rage that reacheth up to heaven ; and now you mean to make these people your slaves. But have not *you* also sinned against God ? Now set the captives free, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you !'

Then four of the chief men of Israel stood up and said to the army, 'You shall not bring the captives into Samaria. Set free the captives you have taken, for our sin is great.'

The voice of these four princes was heard by the army, and all the captives and all the things were given up to the princes.

It does not seem that Pekah spoke a word, if he was there.

The four princes rose up and began to help to clothe the poor captives with the clothes that had been taken from Jerusalem. Seeing many of the captives were barefoot, they gave them shoes. Next they supplied them with food, and afterwards anointed them, to soften their skins, which had been scorched by the sun.

As many of the captives were weak women and little children, the princes got asses for their journey home.

Then they took them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees. That city lies on the border of Judah, about fifty miles from Samaria. There the good princes left them, that the poor captives might return to Jerusalem. Having done this, these good princes returned to Samaria.

We see what a blessing it is to have even a few good men in a city.

Though Pekah had conquered in this war, he soon had an enemy that he could not conquer. It was the great King of Assyria. Pul was dead; but there was another king, called Tiglath-pileser (which means Lord of Tigris). He came to the tribes beyond Jordan, and conquered their cities, and took away a multitude of captives.

At the end of twenty years Pekah was murdered.

CHAPTER LXXX.

REIGN OF HOSHEA.

(2 KINGS, xv. 30; xvii. 1–23. 2 CHRON. xxx. 5–12.)

AND how did Pekah die?

Like most of these kings, he was killed by one of his own people. A man named Hoshea joined with other Israelites in making a plan to kill Pekah. Hoshea slew him, and then became king himself.

When he was king, he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Shall you not be surprised to hear that he was not as bad as any of the other kings? Therefore he was the BEST of the kings of Israel.

Though best, he was bad; and though bad, he was best. He was also the LAST king of Israel.

His name has the same meaning as Joshua and Jesus. It means Saviour; but he proved no saviour to Israel.

The Lord was soon going to give Israel up, but first He gave them another opportunity of turning from their sins. The Lord is so kind and merciful, that He is very slow to give up and to destroy sinners. 'He is not willing that any should perish.' (2 Pet. iii.)

There was a very good king at Jerusalem at this time: his name was Hezekiah. He was going to keep the Passover in his city. He sent messengers all over the land to entreat people to come to this Passover. He sent them to his own people, and he sent them also to the ten tribes who were under Hoshea.

The messengers went from city to city with Hezekiah's letters. They read the letters aloud: 'Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord, and He will turn to you; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and He will not turn His face away from you, if ye return unto Him.'

How were these messengers treated?

The people of Israel laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Just a few humbled themselves and went up to Jerusalem. These men must have been mocked by their neighbours for going to Jerusalem; but it is a blessed thing to be mocked for righteousness' sake.

The Israelites received many other warnings, besides Hezekiah's letters.

There was a very old prophet, who had been prophesying sixty years. He had the same name as the king: his name was Hosea. He spoke a great deal against the golden calf.

There was now only *one* golden calf: the calf at Dan had been taken away by the Assyrians; the other calf, at Bethel, alone remained. Hosea said of that calf, 'It shall be broken in pieces (viii. 6). He said of the king, 'He is cut off as the foam upon the water.' He said of the people, 'They shall be wanderers among the nations' (ix. 17). He said of the land, 'Samaria shall become desolate, for she hath rebelled against her God' (xiii. 16).

Soon, very soon, were these prophecies fulfilled.

There was another king of Assyria: he was the son of Tiglath-pileser, and was named Shalma-nezer. He came up against Hoshea, and conquered him, but he did not take him captive. He made an agreement with Hoshea that a large sum of money should be paid every year. Hoshea promised to pay the money, and so Shalmanezer went away. But Hoshea soon got tired of paying the money year by year. Then he sent to the king of Egypt, So, to help him to resist the king of Assyria. Thus he broke his word, for he had promised to pay the money.

Shalmanezer was angry with Hoshea for not

paying the money, and he came against him, and besieged Samaria.

And how long did this siege last?

Three years. What sufferings the people must have endured, shut up in the city!—much more than they had suffered in the days of Jehoram, when the woman killed her baby.

At the end of three years Samaria was taken.

The king of Assyria took a multitude of captives, and placed them in the cities of Assyria. Their homes were broken up, their children slain.

What became of Hoshea, the king?

He also was taken to Assyria, and shut up in prison till he died.

So there was an end of the kingdom of Israel.

Shalmanezer would not allow any other king to reign over Israel but himself.

All this came upon Israel for disobeying the word of the Lord.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE LAST LONG PUNISHMENT OF ISRAEL.

(2 KINGS, xvii. 6, 10, 18, 21, 24, to end.)

How sad was the state of the land of Israel after the people went into captivity!

Once that land was full of villages, and fruit-trees, and corn-fields, and flocks of sheep.

Now the gardens were choked with weeds, the vineyards were trampled down by foxes, the empty houses inhabited by wild beasts and birds.

We know well the reason of this sad change. It was because the Israelites had once set images on every high hill and under every green tree.

Therefore the Lord was angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight.

Jeroboam was the chief cause of the sins of Israel, for 'he *drave* Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin.'

It may be that many of the Israelites repented when they were scattered about in heathen lands, but we have heard nothing about them since they were taken away. A *few* were still left in the land, and a *few* may have returned since, but the *nation* never has returned.

During forty years the land remained almost empty, and very desolate.

During this time Shalmanezer died, and there was a king over Assyria named Esar-haddon. This king thought it a pity that the fruitful land of Israel should remain almost empty. So he sent a great many of his own people to live in the land. They came and lived in the empty houses of Samaria, and in all the cities.

These new inhabitants were heathen, and did not know how to worship God. They brought their idols with them, and worshipped them.

But the Lord was displeased with this, and He sent lions to devour them.

Then they said among themselves, 'Why do these lions come? They must be sent by the God of the land.' (For they thought that there was a different god for every land.)

So they sent a message to Esar-haddon, king of Assyria, to tell him about the lions. He thought it would be best to send a priest of Israel to teach the people how to worship the God of Israel.

So he said to some of his chief men, 'Go and carry into the land of Israel—one of the priests whom you took from the land, and let him go and live there again, and let him teach the new people how to worship the God of the land.'

The Assyrians obeyed, and chose a priest from among the captives, and took him back to his land.

This priest must have been an old priest, for it was forty years ago since he had been taken captive. So now he may have been sixty or seventy years old.

Was he a good priest? No; the priests who had lived in the land were priests of the golden calves, whom they called God.

This priest, when he came, went to Bethel and lived there, and taught the people how they should fear the Lord; but he taught them quite wrong.

The new people began to worship in the way he told them, but they worshipped their own gods also. These new people had come from

different countries, and they worshipped different gods. Every one worshipped his own god. They found plenty of idol temples all over the land, and they placed their own idols in these temples.

It was very wrong of these people to go on worshipping their old idols, when they said they would worship the God of Israel. If the priest who was sent had been good he would have told them to give up their old idols, and to worship God alone.

The land of Israel was now called Samaria, after the chief city.

The new people were now called Samaritans.

When our blessed Lord long afterwards came to live down here, He talked often to Samaritans, and taught them about His Father. You must remember the woman of Samaria at the well.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

A GOOD KING'S VISIT TO BETHEL.

(2 KINGS, xxiii. 13–20.)

THERE is only one more event to relate at this time respecting the land of Israel in old times.

About fifty years after the old priest came from Assyria to dwell at Bethel, there came a king to visit the place. He was the king of

Judah, and he lived at Jerusalem. His name was Josiah. He was young, and full of zeal for the glory of God. With him there came many strong men, carrying spades and mattocks and clubs.

Why did this king of Judah come to Bethel accompanied by this troop of workmen? He came to fulfil a prophecy made three hundred and fifty years before.

Do you remember a young man from Judah coming to Bethel? It was in the days of the first Jeroboam that he came. He found that king worshipping the golden calf. You remember how he dried up his hand, and then restored it.

The young prophet from Judah had declared that a king would one day come and burn priests upon the idol's altar.

That day was now arrived, and the priests were to be burned. There they were — surrounding the altar, and offering incense to the calf. Priest after priest had done this for three hundred and fifty years, and now the time of judgment was come.

The place of which Jacob had said, 'This is the house of God,' had long been the house of Satan. The place of which Jacob had said, 'This is the gate of Heaven,' had long been the gate of Hell.

Josiah saw a great many tombs upon the hill of Bethel. He heard that those were the tombs

of the priests who had served the calf year after year, and had died.

He desired their bones to be dug up and burned upon Jeroboam's altar. Dead men's bones would defile that altar.

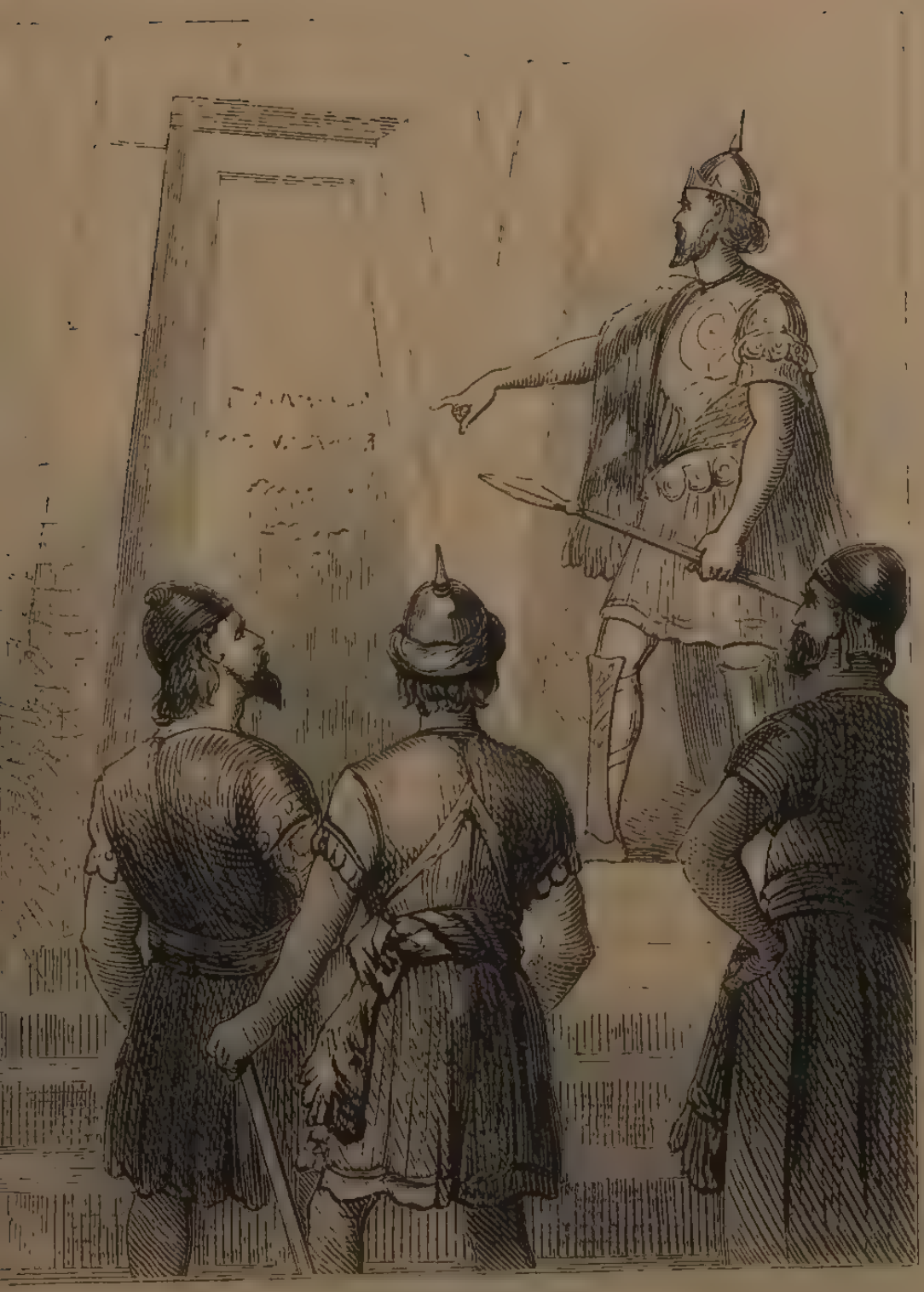
While he was walking among these sepulchres he observed one tomb different from the rest, with writing upon the stone. He asked the men of the city, 'What is that writing?'

They replied, 'That is the tomb of the man of God who once came from Judah, and declared that all the things should be done that you have just done.'

Then Josiah remembered the wonderful story, for he had read it in the word of God. He remembered how that prophet was enticed by an old prophet to disobey the Lord and go to his house, and how he was slain by a lion, and buried in the tomb prepared for the old prophet himself. All this Josiah remembered; so he said to his servants, 'Let him alone; let no man move his bones.'

Josiah knew that prophet had been good, though he had once been tempted to disobey.

No one touched the tomb where the prophet lay. In his tomb the old prophet's bones were lying also, and so those bones also were not moved. But in the day when all who are in the graves shall come forth,—then the bones of the good prophet will be divided from the bones of the deceitful old man.



2 Kings, xxiii. 17.

'Then Josiah said, What title is that that I see?' —P. 202.

Josiah had much to do to the altar at Bethel. It was built upon a wooden platform, called a high place, and it could be seen by all the worshippers. Josiah brake down the altar, and ground the stones to powder, and burned the high place and the grove.

Leaving Bethel, Josiah visited all the cities of Samaria, and threw down all the idol temples, and burned the high places; and slew the priests that he found there, and burned their bones on the altars. Josiah took away all the idols that he could find in all parts of Israel, and made the people serve the Lord their God.

As long as Josiah lived the people continued to follow the God of their fathers.

What good Josiah did in his journeys! Through him—idols were removed from the land.

When Jesus came, six hundred years after, He did not find the people of Samaria worshipping idols.

Will the ten tribes ever return to their own land?

Where are they?

Scattered among all countries; yet they will be found in God's own time, and they will return to the land of their fathers: for God has said, 'Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.'

So we are quite sure they will return.

'Has He said it, and will He not do it?'

LIST OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL,

ALL OF WHOM WERE WICKED.

	Years of reign.
Jeroboam, who made the golden calves	22
Nadab his son	2
Baasha who killed Nadab	24
Elah his son, who was slain while drinking by Zimri	2
Zimri, who burned himself in his palace	1 month
Omri, who built Samaria	12
Ahab his son, who married Jezebel	22
Ahaziah, who fell out of window	2
Jehoram his brother, slain by Jehu	12
Jehu, who slew Ahab's family	28
Jehoahaz, his son	17
Joash his son, who visited Elisha when dying	16
Jeroboam II., his son	42
Zachariah, his son, last of Jehu's family	6 months
Shallum, who killed Zachariah	1 month
(Pul, king of Assyria, *first* invaded Israel.)	
Menahem, who killed Zachariah	12
Pekahiah his son	2
Pekah, who killed Pekahiah	20
(Tiglath-pileser invaded Israel.)	
Hoshea, who killed Pekah	9

Shalmanezer, king of Assyria, carried him into Assyria, and kept him in prison till he died. He was the least wicked of the kings.

HISTORY OF KINGS OF JUDAH.

THE KINGS OF JUDAH.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE REIGN OF REHOBOAM.

(1 Kings, xii. 12 to end.)

We have read the history of the kingdom of Israel. The first king was Jeroboam, the last was Hoshea.

There were nineteen in all; there was not one good. Hoshea, the last king, was the least wicked, though very wicked.

How long was it from Jeroboam to Hoshea?

Almost three hundred years. Jeroboam began to reign nearly a thousand years before Christ. Hoshea was taken into captivity more than seven hundred years before Christ.

You know well why God let Jeroboam take ten tribes away from Solomon's son. It was to show His anger against Solomon for worshipping idols.

Jeroboam was a servant of Solomon's, and he

was told by a prophet that he should rule over ten tribes.

After Solomon was dead Jeroboam made a plan for getting the kingdom.

Solomon had left a son called Rehoboam. He was the son of one of those strange women whom Solomon loved so wickedly. Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonitess, and a descendant of Lot.

Rehoboam was not wise like his father, and by his folly he lost the ten tribes.

Jeroboam came at the head of the people, and asked him not to rule so strictly as his father.

Rehoboam's answer was, that his little finger should be thicker than his father's legs, or loins.

This answer made the people angry.

The ten tribes of Israel were the most angry, and they said to the king, 'We have no part in the family of David.' Then they cried out, 'To thy tents, O Israel!' They meant to fight, if Rehoboam came against them. But the tribe of Judah, with Benjamin, continued faithful to Rehoboam.

Rehoboam sent a chief man, called Adoram, to get them to pay money to him as their king. But how did they receive this man? Instead of paying him money, they stoned him with stones till he died.

Rehoboam was on his way to the camp of Israel when the news was brought him of Adoram's death. Then he turned the horses of his chariot, and went back to Jerusalem.

There he collected a great army to fight against Israel. He set out with his army, but a prophet met him on his way. This prophet was called Shemaiah. He said, 'The Lord saith, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren, the children of Israel. Return every man to his house. This thing is from me.'

What did the prophet mean by 'This thing is from me?'

He meant that Israel rebelling was from God.

Rehoboam and his army believed the prophet's message and returned home.

Meanwhile the ten tribes had called Jeroboam and made him king over them.

All that Rehoboam could now do was to make his cities strong with walls and towers, and to furnish them with shields and spears.

It would have been better still if he had walked in righteousness and worshipped only the God of his fathers.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE INVASION OF SHISHAK, KING OF EGYPT, IN THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM.

(2 CHRON. xi. 5 to end; xii.)

THERE came into the land of Judah a number of priests and Levites. They came from the land of Israel.

And why had they come?

Because Jeroboam would not let them serve the Lord. He wanted priests for his golden calves, and for the devils which he worshipped; and he made any one a priest who would serve them.

A great many people came out from the ten tribes to Jerusalem. They were people who set their hearts to serve the Lord. It was a great blessing for the tribe of Judah to have so many priests and good people living in the midst of them.

During three years the king and his people served the Lord, and while they walked in good ways the Lord made them strong, and kept them from being hurt by enemies.

But when the king found himself strong, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all his people with him. He married many wives. His favourite wife was named Maachah. She was the daughter of Absalom (but not the Absalom who was David's son). She worshipped an idol.

Rehoboam began to do the same, and his people followed his example. They did more to provoke the Lord than their fathers had ever done. They built high places, and placed images under every green tree.

After two years of these sins the Lord sent a punishment.

The king of Egypt came into the land with a vast army. Shishak was the king; he was the first king of Egypt that had ever attacked Judah.

As he was on his way he took all the cities of Judah that Rehoboam had made so strong with towers and walls.

Rehoboam and his princes met together in Jerusalem to consult what to do. Then came the same prophet Shemaiah, that had spoken once before, and said, 'Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore I have left you in the hand of Shishak.'

How did the king and his princes receive this terrible message? Were they angry with the prophet?

No; they all said, 'The Lord is righteous.' They owned they deserved the punishment. This was humbling themselves.

When the Lord saw *this*, He spoke again to Shemaiah, 'They have humbled themselves, therefore I will not destroy them; I will grant them some deliverance; my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by Shishak: nevertheless, they shall be his servants.'

Shemaiah brought this message to the king and princes. Now they saw that they should have to pay money and lose their treasures.

Shishak came to Jerusalem; he brought an immense army with him—twelve hundred chariots, and sixty thousand horsemen.

It was no use to resist such a host. Shishak entered Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the king, and of the house of God. HE TOOK ALL.

Among the treasures he took — were some golden shields, which Solomon had made. This was a great loss. Rehoboam made some shields of brass, and he gave them to the chief of the guard to keep; and whenever the king went to the temple the guard and his men fetched them, and guarded him with the shields on his way to the house of God.

Thus we see that Rehoboam used to worship in the temple; but had he served the Lord he would not have needed shields to guard him. God would have been his shield.

The Lord fulfilled His promise of not letting Shishak destroy him, because he had humbled himself. Yet Rehoboam was not really good, for he did not prepare his *heart* to seek the Lord, and therefore he did evil. He died at the age of fifty-eight, having reigned seventeen years.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE REIGN OF ABIJAH.

(2 CHRON. xiii.)

ABIJAH was the favourite son of Rehoboam, because he was the son of his favourite wife, Maachah.*

* In this chapter it is said that the name of Abijah's mother was Micaiah. But that name is the same as Maachah. She is said also to be the daughter of Uriel. That must be another name for Absalom.

On that account he chose Abijah to be king after him.

As his mother was an idolater we are not surprised to find him not truly good, but very much like his parents in character.

As soon as Abijah was king, Jeroboam made war against him. This was no new thing. There had been continual wars between Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

This time the king of Israel brought a mighty army into the field—eight hundred thousand. Abijah had only half the number, four hundred thousand.

These vast armies met in Mount Ephraim, in the kingdom of Jeroboam.

It was enough to terrify Abijah to see an army twice as large as his own, but he felt confident that God would deliver him. He stood on the top of a hill, and made a brave speech. Generals of armies usually speak to their own soldiers, but Abijah spoke to his enemies. He said, 'Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel. You know that the Lord gave the kingdom to David, and that Jeroboam has rebelled against his king, and we are the sons of David.

'And there are golden calves with you, which Jeroboam made you for gods.

'And have ye not cast out the priests of the Lord, and made you priests of your own?

'But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; but ye have forsaken

Him: and behold, God Himself is our Captain.'

And what do you think of this speech? Is there too much boasting in it? and too much reproaching of others?

It reminds one of the pride of Jehu, king of Israel.

The battle began.

Jeroboam had cunningly hidden part of his army among the mountains. The hidden part was called an ambushment.

Suddenly the hidden soldiers came forth. The men of Judah looked back, and saw enemies behind as well as before. Then they cried unto the Lord, and the priests sounded with the trumpets.

The men of Judah were so full of faith that they shouted, as if they felt sure of conquering through God's power.

At the same moment God made Jeroboam and his army give way, and flee away. Abijah and his army slew them with a great slaughter.

There never was such a slaughter in any battle —five hundred thousand—more than half of Israel's army.

And why did God grant this great victory?

Because of the prayers of the men of Judah, and not because of the proud speech of Abijah. It is not said that he prayed at all.

Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took many of his towns. Amongst others he took Bethel.

How it must have vexed Jeroboam to lose his golden calf and his temple! But Israel soon got back that wicked place.

Jeroboam was never able to go to war again; and he soon died by the hand of the Lord. He died in his sins.

How did Abijah act?

He walked in all the sins of his father Rehoboam. One of those sins was making idols. Though Abijah spoke so much against Israel's sins, he worshipped idols also, for his heart was not perfect with the Lord; his heart was not sincere; he did not truly love God. His reign was very short,—only three years.

He died, leaving many wives and children. He was buried in Jerusalem with the kings who died before him.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE REIGN OF ASA.

(2 CHRON. xiv. xv.)

ASA became king. He was the son of Abijah He did not follow his father's example, but began immediately to cut down the groves, and to break down the images which his fathers had made.

What fathers? His own father Abijah, his

grandfather Rehoboam, and his great-grandfather Solomon.

We do not know who his mother was, but we know the name of his grandmother. Her name was Maachah. She had been the favourite wife of Rehoboam, and she was still alive. She had made an idol, and kept it in a grove. Asa burned her idol, and threw the ashes into the brook Kedron, that there might be nothing left of it that could be seen. Neither would he allow her to be queen, or to have any power in the land.

Was it right for Asa to treat his grandmother in this way? Yes, for he was king, and was bound to put away everything that would make his people wicked.

He thought it right to prepare against an enemy coming. So he made his cities strong with walls and towers, and he collected an immense army. It numbered five hundred and eighty thousand.

Soon the enemy came with an army nearly twice as large. This enemy was Zerah, from Ethiopia, in the south. He had a thousand thousand men, which are a million—1,000,000.

Asa cried unto the Lord before the battle, saying, 'Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power. Help us, for we rest on Thee.' Then the battle began, and the Lord smote the Ethiopians, and they fled.

Asa and his army pursued them to Gerar, in the south of the land, and they came home with many things and much cattle.

As they were returning to Jerusalem they met a prophet. His name was Azariah. He was not come to reprove, but to encourage. He said to Asa and his army, 'The Lord is with you while you be with Him. If ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you.'*

The words of Azariah, son of Oded, encouraged Asa to put away more idols.

A great many of the ten tribes came to worship at Jerusalem. It was a happy sight to see these men joining with the men of Judah in making a covenant to serve the Lord.

God had already made a law that idolaters should be put to death, and this law they all promised to observe.

Many sacrifices were offered, and there was shouting and blowing of trumpets, and great joy.

* The rest of the prophet's speech should be put in the future tense, and not in the past, and then it is clear: instead of 'Now for a long season Israel *hath been* without the true God,' read '*will be* without the true God.' Go on to read, 'When they in their trouble *shall* turn, &c., and seek Him, He *will be* found of them,' &c.—2 Chron. xv. 3–8.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

SINS AND SORROWS OF ASA.

(1 KINGS, xv. 16–23. 2 CHRON. xvi. 7 to end.)

ASA had behaved like a righteous man in the beginning of his reign. But he acted wrong on some occasions afterwards.

Baasha was now reigning over Israel. It was he who had slain Jeroboam's family with the sword.

He grew jealous of Asa. He did not like that so many of his people should go and live in Asa's kingdom. He built a great tower at the place where the kingdoms joined—in order to prevent his people going to Judah. That place was called Ramah.

Baasha was so angry that he declared war against Asa.

Did Asa again trust in the Lord?

No, this time he trusted in the king of Syria. This king was Ben-hadad.

He had heard that Ben-hadad had promised to help Baasha; and he thought, if he sent him a great deal of gold and silver, that Ben-hadad would help *him* instead. So he took all the treasures in the temple and in the palace, and gave them to his servants to take to Ben-hadad

in Damascus; and he sent a message with his present. It was to ask Ben-hadad to make Baasha leave him alone, and not to mind having promised to help Baasha.

Ben-hadad accepted the present, and sent his men to fight against the cities of Israel. Then Baasha left off building Ramah, and went to his palace in Tirzah.

Asa sent his men to take away the wood and stones of Ramah to build towers for his own kingdom.

Was God pleased with Asa for getting help from Syria?

No; a prophet soon came to him, named Hanani. He came not to encourage him, but to reprove him.

He said, 'Were not the Ethiopians a huge host? Yet the Lord delivered you, because you trusted in Him. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him. You have done foolishly; henceforth you shall have wars.'

Did Asa humble himself?

No, he was very angry with the prophet—quite in a rage—and he put him in a prison-house. This was a great sin.

At the same time he was unkind and unjust to some of his people.

Afterwards he had a dreadful disease in his feet; yet in his illness he did not go to the Lord,

but trusted only in the physicians. It is not wrong to have doctors when we are ill, but we should trust in the Lord only to make us well.

Two years afterwards Asa died, and was buried in a tomb which he had made for himself in Jerusalem. And the people laid him in this last bed or bier. This bed was filled with sweet ointments of all kinds. The people showed their love for their king by coming to his burial. Also they made a great burning of sweet plants for him. They loved him because he had generally been just and merciful.

He reigned forty-one years.

Was he a good king? Yes; for it is written, 'His *heart* was perfect with the Lord *all* his days.' Thus we know that he loved the Lord.

In some things he acted ill, especially in putting the prophet in prison. His grandfather, Rehoboam, acted well, when a prophet reproved him. Asa, on the contrary, punished the prophet who reproved him. Yet Asa was a good man, while Rehoboam was a wicked man. This shows us that we must not judge of a person's character by one or two actions. We must look at his whole life. God looks at the heart. Asa's heart was right.

Sometimes good people do very wrong things: but then God sends them great trouble. Asa had great troubles in his old age, through wars with Baasha, and through his great disease in his legs.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT.

(1 KINGS, xxii. 41–45. 2 CHRON. xvii. 2 to end; xviii. 1–2.)

THE son of Asa sat on the throne. His name was Jehoshaphat.

Like his father, he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; not only in the sight of *men*, but in the sight of the Lord, who sees the heart.

He was twenty-five when he began to reign.

He took great pains to make his people good. Asa had done so, too. His plan had been to make people promise to serve God. That was well. But Jehoshaphat had a still better plan. He sent good men to all his cities to read to the people out of God's law. These were his Scripture-readers. But their Scriptures were not as large as ours. They had only the first books of the Bible as far as Kings, with Job, the Psalms, and the writings of Solomon.

These few books, written on rolls, were carried about by a company of princes, priests, and Levites, who explained them to the people.

The Lord blessed Jehoshaphat, and made him feel very happy.

Jehoshaphat did not neglect to make his cities strong, and to train thousands of soldiers, that the nation might be prepared for war, if enemies should come.

However, for many years no enemies came, for God made them afraid of Jehoshaphat; so that they made no war against him.

Jehoshaphat was anxious not to make war with the king of Israel. His fathers, Rehoboam and Abijah and Asa, had many wars with Israel, and Jehoshaphat desired not to be like them in this respect.

But while it was right to wish for peace, it was wrong to make friends with the enemies of God.

Who would have thought that this good Jehoshaphat would allow his son to marry the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel?

We know that Ahab was one of the worst of men. He did more evil in the sight of the Lord than all the kings that were before him. One of Ahab's evil acts was to marry Jezebel, daughter of Eth-Baal, king of Zidon. Jezebel was even worse than Ahab—nor was their daughter good. The princess Athaliah may have been beautiful, but she was brought up to worship Baal.

Yet Jehoshaphat had agreed that his eldest son Jehoram should marry Athaliah. You will

hear what dreadful things happened through this princess coming to live at Jerusalem.*

Several years after this marriage was made, Jehoshaphat paid a visit to Ahab in Samaria. He brought with him a great number of his servants.

Ahab received him with great honour, and made a fine feast. He desired a great number of sheep and oxen to be killed for the feast.

Was Jezebel there, with her finely dressed hair and her painted face?

Did the prophets of Baal, who fed from Jezebel's table, appear in the presence of Jehoshaphat?

Were the images of Baal to be seen in the royal palace?

As Jehoshaphat loved God he must have been grieved, if he saw these sights.

Yet he was very friendly in his behaviour to Ahab.

While feasting in Samaria, Ahab began talking about his enemies the Syrians. He remarked to his servants, 'You know that Ramoth-Gilead is one of our cities; why do we not take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?'

Then he said to Jehoshaphat, 'Wilt thou go with me to the battle to Ramoth-Gilead?'

Jehoshaphat did not like war, but he thought he could not refuse Ahab's request, and he

* The words in 2 Chron. xviii. 1, 'Jehoshaphat joined affinity to Ahab,' refer to the marriage of Jehoram of Judah with Athaliah of Samaria.

answered, 'I am as thou art; my people as thy people; my horses as thy horses.'

It was very wrong to make this answer.

Jehoshaphat, when he spoke thus, thought more about pleasing men than God.

You have already heard of the battle at Ramoth-Gilead, but it is so interesting that it may well be read again.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

JEHOSHAPHAT WITH AHAB IN THE BATTLE AGAINST SYRIA.

(2 Chron. xix. 1–8; xx. 1–27.)

Two kings had gone out to fight at Ramoth-Gilead. But only one returned alive. The body of the other was carried to Samaria, and his blood was licked up by dogs.

Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem in peace, but he did not return in the favour of the Lord. Before he entered the city he beheld a prophet coming to meet him.

It was the son of the prophet whom Asa had once imprisoned. The son of Hanani was come to reprove the son of Asa. Jehu was his name.

He did not refuse to reprove Jehoshaphat, though his father had been imprisoned by Asa.

He said to Jehoshaphat, 'Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore there is wrath upon thee from the Lord.'

This was a terrible sentence to hear. But the prophet went on to praise the king, and said, 'There are good things found in thee; for thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and thou hast prepared thine heart to seek God.'

How did Jehoshaphat receive this message?

He went on doing all the good he could in his land, and not only in Judah but in Israel also.

He went all over the land himself, persuading people to turn back to the Lord.

This was, indeed, taking the Lord's reproof well.

He knew, however, that he should have a punishment for going with Ahab to help him in his wars.

This punishment was, that a great multitude of enemies gathered together against him — the Moabites, the Ammonites, and Edomites. Those nations were all descended from Abraham, and the Israelites had been forbidden to hurt them on their way to Canaan with Moses.

They all lived round about the Dead Sea, and they came into the wilderness of Judah close to the Dead Sea.

How did Jehoshaphat prepare to meet this multitude?

By setting himself to seek the Lord; by fasting also; and by going to the temple with his

people to pray for help. He himself stood in the court and prayed aloud.

There were many little children with their mothers standing in the court, as well as a multitude of men.

The last words of the king's prayer was, 'We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee.'

The Spirit of the Lord fell upon one of the Levites, and he told them where to go, even to the cliff Ziz, in the wilderness. He prophesied, 'Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; the Lord will be with you.' The king bowed his head with his face to the ground, and the Levites sang with a loud voice.

The people rose early and went to the wilderness. Singers led the way, praising the Lord. While they were singing, the Lord was fighting for the army. He smote the people in some secret manner. It is probable the Lord employed some of his angels to begin the slaughter.

The three nations were thrown into confusion, and they began to destroy one another. Ammon and Moab destroyed Edom, and then—one another.

When the men of Judah came to a tower, some of them mounted to the top to see where the enemies were. They saw no enemies, but they saw the ground covered with dead bodies. The army found the bodies richly adorned with jewels, and all kinds of treasures. It took them three days to gather up these precious things.

On the fourth day they assembled in a valley to bless the Lord, and they gave it the name of the Valley of Blessing, or Berachah.

The king led back his army to Jerusalem with great joy; not one man lost, and *all* the enemies dead.

They praised the Lord with harps and trumpets in the temple.

When other countries heard how God had delivered His people — every one was afraid. So Jehoshaphat was quiet in his kingdom: for his God gave him rest round about.

So you see that the wrath of the Lord was turned into a blessing, when Jehoshaphat took the reproof so well, and only tried the more to serve God.

When we have displeased God, let us show our repentance by trying to serve Him more than ever.

CHAPTER XC.

THE LAST YEARS OF JEHOSHAPHAT.

(2 CHRON. xx. 35 to end; xx. 31–35.)

AFTER this great victory, Jehoshaphat had another temptation to join with the wicked.

Ahab had died in battle at Ramoth-Gilead,

while Jehoshaphat was helping him against the Syrians.

Ahab's son had now become king of Israel. His name was Ahaziah. He worshipped Baal as Ahab had done, and did all the same wicked things.

Jehoshaphat should have had no dealings with this wicked young man.

But he agreed to send ships to fetch gold from Ophir,* and to let his ships go there with the ships of Ahaziah.

These ships were all built at a place on the Red Sea, called Ezion-Geber.

They were to sail down the Red Sea to Arabia, and to come back laden with gold. Gold often tempts men to do wrong. Jehoshaphat seems to have been covetous, for he had already immense treasures that he had gathered from the battle-field of the three nations near the Dead Sea. Jehoshaphat wanted to make his children rich. He did make them rich, but no blessing rested on his children, as you will hear.

After the ships had set out—a prophet came to the king with news of his ships. It was a prophet we have not heard of before.

He said, 'Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord has broken thy works.' And

* In 2 Chron. xx. 36, it is said the ships were to go to Tarshish; yet it could not have been to Tarshish in Spain, but to some place near Ophir, to which Solomon used also to trade for gold.

soon the king heard that his ships had been wrecked and had not been able to go to Tarshish.

But there were some ships left. Ahaziah sent a message to Jehoshaphat, saying, 'Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships.'

This time Jehoshaphat refused. He had learned at last not to join with the ungodly.

Jehoshaphat was the father of seven sons.

The worst of his sons was Jehoram, the eldest. We cannot be surprised at this, because Jehoram had so very wicked a wife, even Athaliah.

Jehoshaphat was very kind to his sons, and gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, and even cities for their own. He allowed Jehoram to reign with him for four years before his own death, because he was the first-born.

He cannot have been happy with such a wicked son to help him in ruling his kingdom. Perhaps he did not know how very wicked he was. Yet he must have seen that his son and his son's wife worshipped Baal. Oh, had he known what that wicked pair would do to his sons and grandsons after his death, he would have been filled with horror and dismay!

Jehoshaphat died at the age of sixty. He was buried with his fathers in the city of David, in Jerusalem. It was an evil day for Jerusalem when this good king died.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE REIGN OF JORAM (OR JEHORAM).

(2 CHRON. xxi.)

JEHORAM was more wicked than any king of Judah who had yet reigned: Rehoboam and Abijah did evil in the sight of the Lord; but Joram was a monster of iniquity, as you will see.

His six younger brothers were all better than himself: perhaps he hated them on this account, just as Cain hated Abel, 'because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous.'

Certain it is that he did hate them, and wanted to get them out of his way. As his brothers lived in strong cities of Judah with towers and walls, it was not easy to destroy them: so he first made himself very strong with soldiers and weapons; and then he sent an army against his brothers, to kill them with the sword. Cain killed one brother—Jehoram killed six.

He killed also many of the princes at the same time. It may be they were good men who tried to defend the brothers.

After these murders he encouraged his people to worship idols, by building high places for them

in the mountains; and he even forced them to go to these places.

No prophet came to reprove him. It might have been dangerous for a prophet to come near him. There came a letter. From whom? That great prophet Elijah.

He was already gone up to heaven (as some think). If he were gone up, he must have written this letter beforehand, and directed some good man to give it to Jehoram at the right time.

This letter was a very terrible one. It began by telling Jehoram of his crimes—in making his people worship idols, and in killing his brothers, who were better than himself.

Also it was written in the letter,—

'Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: and *thou* shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of thy sickness day by day.'

This dreadful letter did not turn Jehoram from his wickedness.

The Lord soon sent the punishments He had threatened.

The first evil that happened was the Edomites rebelled against him. Joram rose up by night to fight, but though he killed many, he could not get the Edomites to submit.

A city called Libnah rebelled against him, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers.

Worse evils soon followed. The Lord stirred up the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians against him. They were strong nations, and could do much harm. They came up into Judah and brake into Jerusalem, and rushed into the palace, and took away all Jehoram's fine things, and took away his sons and his wives—all except one wife and one son. That one wife who remained was Athaliah. It would have been a blessing to the land if she had been taken. One son also was left—it was the youngest: probably his mother saved him. That child's name was Ahaziah.*

In Elijah's letter God had said that a plague should come upon the king's goods, his wives, and sons. And these words had come true.

The greatest plague was yet to come. It was the disease of the bowels. It was a most disgusting and painful disease. The body of the king corrupted and fell away by degrees. The sickness lasted two years, and then the wretched man expired at the age of forty, having reigned only eight years.

But he had so horrified the people by his murders of his brothers, and by his persecutions of the righteous, that all were glad when he died, and no one burned incense in his honour after his death. You remember what great

* This son is called Jehoahaz in 2 Chron. xxi. 17. But that name has the same meaning, and is in effect the same name, as Ahaziah.

burnings they had made for his grandfather Asa. They made none for Jehoram. Yet they buried him in the city of David, but not with the kings. I do not believe they would have let him be buried at all, had it not been for their respect for his father Jehoshaphat.

His marriage with Athaliah in his youth must have made him more and more wicked, for Athaliah was a woman who persuaded people to commit crimes.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE REIGN OF AHAZIAH.

(2 CHRON. xxii. 1–9. 2 KINGS, ix. 27–29.)

AHAZIAH* was a young man of twenty-two years old when he began to reign. He was the only son of his parents, for all his brothers had been killed by the Arabians. He was then a young lad, and he had escaped. It was through God's gracious care that this child was saved, but God would not let the whole family of David be destroyed.

Ahaziah had seen his father punished for sin by dying of a loathsome disease. He ought to

* Ahaziah is called in one passage Jehoahaz and in another

have taken warning by the sight; but his wicked mother Athaliah was still living, and she advised him to do wickedly.

His mother's brother, Joram, was now king of Israel, and Ahaziah saw a great deal of his mother's relations, and he was advised by them all to walk in evil ways. Thus he went on in the path of destruction.

His uncle Joram asked him to go with him to Ramoth-Gilead, to drive away the Syrians. He consented to go. This was the very same thing as his grandfather Jehoshaphat had done, when he went with Ahab to the same place.

In the course of the war at Ramoth-Gilead the archers wounded Joram, as they had once wounded Ahab: but they did not give him a mortal wound. There were hopes of Joram's recovery. As Joram could no longer fight, he went home to his own country to be healed of his wounds. He preferred going to his palace at Jezreel, where his mother Jezebel was living, close by Naboth's vineyard (now turned into a garden).

Ahaziah did not stay long at Ramoth, as his uncle was gone home. He wished to know how his uncle Joram was going on, and he went to Jezreel to see him. There also he saw his wicked grandmother, Jezebel. What dreadful company for this young king! But not worse than he had at Jerusalem, for his mother Athaliah was just as wicked as her mother Jezebel.

While he was staying at his uncle's palace in Jezreel—a dreadful event happened.

One day the watchman on the wall cried out that he saw a company coming. No one knew who they were.

When Joram heard this, he desired a horseman to be sent out to meet the company, and inquire whether they came in peace.

The horseman went, but he did not return. Then Joram desired another to be sent.

But he did not return.

The watchman then saw that the chief man in the company was driving his chariot furiously, just as Jehu drove his. Jehu had been one of the soldiers at Ramoth-Gilead, and his way of driving was well known.

When Joram heard that Jehu was coming he was alarmed. Not minding his wounds, Joram got into his chariot, and his nephew Ahaziah followed in his own chariot.

By this time Jehu had got very near the palace, close by the garden which had once been Naboth's vineyard.

When Joram inquired, 'Is it peace?' he received a violent answer from Jehu: 'How can there be peace so long as thy mother Jezebel worships idols so much, and uses so much witchcraft?'

Then Joram knew that Jehu had come to destroy him, and he turned round his horses' heads, and cried out to Ahaziah, 'There is treachery (or rebellion), O Ahaziah!'

As Joram spoke the words, he felt an arrow enter his back, between his shoulders, and come out at his heart, so that he sank down in his chariot, weltering in his own blood. It was Jehu's arrow that had pierced him, and killed him on the spot.

Jehu, seeing that he was close to the garden that used to be Naboth's vineyard, stopped his swift horses, and desired his captain to cast the dead body into this garden: for he remembered the words of the Lord spoken by Elijah many years ago.

Ahaziah beheld the frightful sight, and he hastened along in his chariot past the garden-house: but Jehu saw him endeavouring to escape, and he called out to his servants, 'Smite him also in his chariot.'

Jehu's servants followed Ahaziah as closely as they could: but Ahaziah was too fast for them. Ahaziah took the hilly road that leads to Megiddo. When he had gone about twenty miles in his chariot with his servants, he thought it would be best to hide himself. So he and his servants hid themselves in some valley among the rocks near Gur, in the tribe of Issachar.

When Jehu heard that Ahaziah had escaped, he desired every one to look for him among the hills, for he knew that Ahaziah must be hid somewhere in the land of Samaria.* A great

* 2 Kings, ix. 27. In this passage Samaria must mean the land, not the *town*, of Samaria, for Ahaziah was

search was made, and Ahaziah was found. But he fled in his chariot to Megiddo about ten miles off.

To this place Jehu came. When he arrived, the captive king* was brought before him, and sentenced to be slain.

Thus he died when quite young — only twenty-three years old — because he was visiting his wicked relations at the time they were punished. Thus God brought about his destruction on account of his sins.

CHAPTER XCIII.

THE REIGN OF ATHALIAH.

(2 Chron. xxii. 9–12. 2 Kings, x. 12–14.)

What was done with the dead body of Ahaziah?

It was not cast to the dogs, as Joram's body had been. Jehu allowed the servants of Ahaziah to take their master's body in their master's chariot to Jerusalem.

hid among the hills between Jezreel and Megiddo in Issachar.

* It is said in 2 Kings, ix. 27, 'He fled to Megiddo, and died there.' Again it is said, in 2 Chron. xxii. 9, 'And they brought him to Jehu, and when they had slain him.' To reconcile these statements we conclude that Jehu went to Megiddo.

When the chariot arrived at Jerusalem, the chief men consulted where they should bury the king's body.

They knew that Ahaziah was an ungodly man, and did not deserve to lie near good men; but then they remembered his grandfather Jehoshaphat, and they said, 'Let us bury him with his fathers in the city of David, because he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart.'

You see again how men are sometimes blessed through having a good grandfather.

Ahaziah had very few relations to mourn for him. He had no brothers, for they had all been taken captive by the Arabians and slain. He had no uncles, for they had been slain by his wicked father Joram. He had no cousins. Do you remember their history? Forty-two of Ahaziah's cousins had set out a little while before, to go and see Joram, king of Israel, in Jezreel. They knew that Ahaziah had gone to see Joram, as he lay ill of his wounds. They wanted to get to him, because it was their business to wait on the king. They little knew that Joram was dead, and that Ahaziah was hid among the mountains.

It was to them a joyful thing to visit their uncle Joram, but it turned out to be a miserable time. Jehu met this band of cousins as he was driving to Samaria. He would not let them pass without speaking a word.

Jehu cried out, 'Who are you?' and they

answered, 'We are the relations of Ahaziah, and we are going down to see the children of the king and of the queen.'

Immediately Jehu called out, 'Take hold of them alive!'

So Jehu's servants seized hold of the party alive, and slew them over a pit in a shearing-house.

I suppose the blood of lambs used to flow into this pit. There the blood of the wicked relations was made to flow. There was not one left to tell the dismal tale of the slaughter of the forty-two cousins.

There was scarcely any one of Ahaziah's family who was left. But the wicked mother Athaliah still lived. She knew there were little children in Ahaziah's nursery. She determined to kill them all, that she herself might reign, and she got men with swords to kill them: but as they were killing them, a great lady came and took the baby away, with its nurse, and ran quickly to the temple.

There were a great many little chambers, built in rows, near the temple. Into one of these chambers the kind lady hurried the nurse and babe. There she left them.

Who was this great lady?

She was the baby's aunt. Though all Ahaziah's brothers had long ago been slain by the Arabians, yet Ahaziah's sisters were not thus treated.

This lady's name was Jehosh-a-be-ath. She

was a princess. She was very much grieved to see her brother's children slain, and she stole away the baby, and put him with his nurse into a little bedchamber.

The lady knew of this chamber, because she was married to the high-priest, and lived with him near the temple.

Athaliah got the people to make her queen. And she lived and reigned for six years.

Have you observed how three generations have been killed?

First, the wicked son of Jehoshaphat killed all his brothers.

Then Ahaziah's sons were carried away by the Arabians.

And, last of all, Athaliah killed the children of Ahaziah.

In each case one child was left, because God cared for the family of David, and would not destroy them all.

Our God is a faithful God, and keeps His promises to His saints.

CHAPTER XCIV.

DEATH OF ATHALIAH.

(2 Chron. xxiii. 1–16.)

The baby that was hidden in the chamber was named Joash. During six years the little Joash

remained in the temple, under the care of his aunt Jehoshabeath and her husband the high-priest, good old Jehoiada.

We never hear anything about the baby's mother. We only know that her name was Zibiah, and that she came from the city that lies to the south, called Beersheba, on the way to Egypt. She was an unhappy woman, to lose her husband and all her children at the same time. One, indeed, was saved, but perhaps she did not know it was alive. She may have died when her children were killed, or she may have lived long. We know not.

The time was now come for Joash to be made king; but Jehoiada knew that it would not be easy to set him on the throne. Athaliah had many soldiers, and she could order them to kill any one who offended her.

Jehoiada saw that he must get a great many good people to help him to make Joash king.

The Levites, you know, waited upon the priests in the temple. Some Levites were placed over other Levites, and were called 'captains,' though they were not soldiers. Each was captain over a hundred Levites.

Jehoiada told these six Levite captains the great secret about the little king. Of course they wanted to see him, and Jehoiada showed him to them. He then made them promise to help him in setting up the true king. They promised: they made a covenant with Jehoiada.

Then these six Levites went about the cities of Judah, and asked the Levites in those cities and the chief men—to accompany them to Jerusalem.

When this great company arrived, Jehoiada invited them to assemble in the temple. They had heard from the good Levites about the child, but very few had seen him. The old priest called for the child to be brought. Then he showed little Joash to the whole congregation of Levites; but first he made them all swear that they would do whatever they could to set him up as king. No one was to tell Athaliah about the little prince, for she would speedily have brought an army to destroy him.

Jehoiada began his speech by saying, 'Behold, the king's son,' (that is, Ahaziah's son), 'shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David!'

Jehoiada then told them all his plan of crowning the little king. He wished to get together all the Levites to be his royal guard.

The Levites used to serve in the temple by turns: they were divided into twenty-four sets; and each set of Levites came to serve in the temple on a sabbath, and went out on the next sabbath.

Jehoiada desired that as many Levites as could —should come to the crowning of the child. He desired the Levites to lead the little king into the inner court, at the door of the temple, and let him stand by a pillar in the court. He

desired the Levites to stand all round the king, and he made the people stand in rows in front of them. Every one was commanded to hold a sword or spear in his hand. Jehoiada found in one of the chambers near the temple a number of spears and shields that had been King David's. These he gave to the chief Levites.

When all these things were ready, the little king was led forth from his chamber, and placed on high by his pillar, where he could be seen.

Then Jehoiada brought him two gifts, — a crown and a roll containing the Scriptures. The crown he put on his head, and the roll in his hand. Then he and his sons poured oil upon the child, and cried out, 'God save the king!'

Athaliah in her palace heard the sound of feet running and tongues singing, and she hastened through the gate of her own court into the court of the Lord's house; and there she saw a lovely boy, with a crown upon his head, standing up in the midst of Levites with swords, while singers sang praises and played on harps; there was shouting also, and the sound of trumpets. She had never seen the child since he was a baby; she must have wondered how it was he had not been killed with his brothers. Angry at the sight, she tore her clothes, and cried out 'Treason!' by which she meant that people had risen up against their true queen. But she was no queen at all; —she was a usurper and a murderess.

Jehoiada did not wish her blood to stain the

temple; so he called to the Levites, 'Have her out of the ranges!' (by ranges he meant rows of people). 'Slay her not,' Jehoiada said, 'in the house of the Lord.'

So the Levites seized her and brought her towards her own great palace-gate, through which she had often come forth in her pomp, riding in her chariot. Now she was in no chariot, but running before her enemies. At the horse-gate she was slain.

She was killed as her mother Jezebel had been.

Was she left unburied, and devoured by dogs?

Of this we know nothing. But we see her end was the due reward of her crimes. She was as wicked as one might expect to find the daughter of Ahab and of Jezebel.

CHAPTER XCV.

REIGN OF JOASH.

(2 KINGS, xii. 1–16. 2 CHRON. xxiii. 16 to end; xxiv. 4–6, 12–14.)

THE first thing that Jehoiada did after the death of the queen was to make a covenant with the king and the people.

And what was this covenant?

That they would be the Lord's people.

Having made this promise, the people hastened

to the temple of Baal to pull it down and break in pieces its images and its altars. This was indeed hard work to do in a few hours; but thousands of people, with thousands of mattocks and hatchets, get through much work in a short time.

The people found the priest of Baal serving at his altar, and they slew him among his idols. His name was Mattan.

Baal could not save his own worshipper.

That temple must have been very grand, for Athaliah and her wicked sons (Ahaziah and his brothers) had often robbed God's temple to adorn Baal's temple.

While the people were destroying that temple, Jehoiada was appointing priests to offer sacrifices in God's temple; for in Athaliah's time there had been no sacrifices.

In the evening of that busy day the old priest brought down the young king from the temple to his palace close by. A great company of princes and people accompanied the king. They came through the high gate, and set Joash upon his throne in his palace.

What a change for the child! from one little room to a grand house of his own! from being under the care of his nurse to sitting upon his throne amongst his great lords!

It was happy for him that Jehoiada was near to instruct him, and to put good plans into his head. There was one thing, indeed, in which

Jehoiada did not give him good advice; for he gave him two wives, whereas one would have been much better.

Did the young king care for the house of God, where he had passed his infancy?

Yes, very much: he was sorry to see it broken and disfigured.

How was he to get money to repair and adorn it?

The first plan was to call together all the priests and Levites, and to tell them to go about all the cities of Judah to collect money from all who would give. 'Go every year,' he said, 'till you have got enough money; and make haste.'

But the Levites made no haste at all. They seem to have grown lazy and careless.

Then Joash tried another plan. He told the priests to get money from the people who came to the temple, and then to spend the money in repairing the temple.

But the priests wanted money for themselves, and kept whatever people gave to them.

Joash went on from year to year, without seeing anything done to the house of the Lord.

Twenty-three years had passed away, and he was now thirty.

He would not wait any longer. He called for Jehoiada, his old uncle the priest, and spoke to him about the repairs of the temple.

The Lord had once desired Moses in the wilder-

ness to make every man pay half a shekel to the priests for the tabernacle.

Joash now asked Jehoiada to make all the men of Judah to pay this small sum (about a shilling) for the temple.

Jehoiada approved of the plan. He took a chest, and made a hole in the lid, and placed it near one of the doors of the temple in the court of the men of Israel. He desired some priests to stand near to receive the money from the people who came in, and to put the money in the chest.

When there was a great deal of money in the chest, Jehoiada came, accompanied by a scribe, or writer. He opened the box, put the money into bags, and then counted it: the scribe wrote down the sum. He did not give it to the priests who had been so careless, but to men who knew how to build, called builders. These builders hired masons and carpenters, and bought wood and stone, and brass and iron, and they soon repaired the broken parts of the temple.

After all was paid for—there was some money over, and the builders brought it to Joash and Jehoiada. This money was spent in making vessels for the house of the Lord—such as bowls, and basins, and spoons. The builders were very faithful, and kept none of the money for themselves. It was not necessary for them to give an account of it. They were quite to be trusted,—much more than the priests.

The temple now looked grand and beautiful. Sacrifices were offered there continually (for they had been left off), but now they were offered as long as Jehoiada lived.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE DEATH OF JOASH.

(2 CHRON. xxiv. 15–26. 2 KINGS, xii. 17, 18.)

Now I am going to tell you a very sad history.

Is there anything more sad than to see a person who seemed good become wicked?

Yet this was the case with Joash.

At last Jehoiada died. He was very old when he died: he was one hundred and thirty years. He was old even when Joash was a baby; he must have been ninety even *then*. He was so much respected in Israel that he was buried among the kings in the city of David. It was said of him, 'He has done good in Israel, both towards God and towards His house.'

These words would do well to put on the tombstone of any old man who has spent his life in serving God (if only the word Israel were altered).

As soon as Jehoiada was dead, the princes of Judah came and showed him great reverence,

and acknowledged him for their king; and then they made their wicked request: it was, that the people might begin again to worship idols in the groves.

What a daring request to make! They must have seen that Joash did not really love God.

The king was pleased with the request. Sacrifices were no more offered in the house of God, but the groves were crowded with worshippers.

And what made people like idols so much better than God?

It was the pleasure they enjoyed in the groves that made them like idols so much. There was riotous feasting, merry dancing, foolish songs in the groves; and these the people liked better than the temple service. All about Baal was so gay, and all about the temple so dull: that is what ungodly people thought.

The Lord was very angry with the king and his people for their idolatry. He did not punish them at first, but He sent prophet after prophet to reprove them; yet they would not listen.

I wonder whether old Elisha ever sent them a message? for he was still living in Samaria, though he soon died.

The people sometimes came to the temple, but they did not worship God aright.

One day the son of Jehoiada, named Zechariah, stood up on a high place, where all men could see him, and cried out, 'Why do you disobey the commandments of the Lord? Because

ye have forsaken the Lord, He hath forsaken you.'

It was very brave of Zechariah to speak thus before the king and his people. It was by the Spirit that he spoke.

Those who heard him were so angry that they threw stones at him in the court.

As he was dying this holy priest exclaimed, 'The Lord look upon it and require it!'—which means, that the Lord *would* look and *would* punish the people. These words were a prophecy. Truly the Lord *did* look and punish, very soon.

What an ungrateful man Joash was, to kill the son of the priest who had saved his life! Thus ungrateful were the Jews to Jesus, when they said, 'Crucify Him!' though He had come to save them.

It was very wicked to shed blood in the courts of the Lord. Jehoiada would not let Athaliah's blood be shed there to pollute the place.

The Lord sent troubles very soon.

Joash heard that Hazael, king of Syria, was coming that way. Hazael had taken Gath, and was on his way to Jerusalem. Joash did not trust in the Lord to save him (how could he?) So he took all the holy cups and basins, and all the gold in the temple and in the palace, to the King of Syria, that he might go away; and he did go away. But his army came again; and, though it was small, it broke into Jerusalem, killed all the princes, and took away their trea-

sures to Damascus. The princes well deserved this treatment, for it was they who advised Joash to forsake the Lord and return to idols.

Joash himself had a terrible punishment. He fell ill of many horrible diseases (as once his grandfather Jehoram had done); and while he lay ill in his bed two of his servants rushed in and killed him. This was the Lord's punishment for killing the sons of Jehoiada (for Joash had killed more than one).

The people would not bury him among the kings, but only in the city of David. No doubt the people saw how ungrateful it was in him to kill Jehoiada's sons. They had honoured Jehoiada by placing him among the kings, and they dishonoured Joash. He was indeed a very guilty man, for he had been brought up in so holy a manner, and had been instructed for so many years by such a holy priest: therefore he was much more guilty than his father Ahaziah, who had been corrupted by his father Jehoram, and his more abominable mother Athaliah.

Joash reigned forty years, and was forty-seven when he died.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE REIGN OF AMAZIAH.

(2 CHRON. XXV. 1–10.)

AMAZIAH sat on his father's throne. He was twenty-five years old. Though his father had

been slain, the people acknowledged him to be king.

One of his first acts was to put to death the two wicked men who had killed his father; but he did not slay their children, because it is written in the law of Moses, 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children for the fathers; but every one shall be put to death for his own sin.'

Whenever we hear of children being slain with their fathers by God's command, we may be sure that those children had joined with their fathers in wickedness.

Amaziah began his reign well; and so did Joash. Can we be sure that he will continue to do right?

After he had reigned a few years, he fought against the Edomites. He gathered as large an army as he could—three hundred thousand—but he did not think it large enough, though the men were all strong, and could handle both spear and shield. So he hired some soldiers from the king of Israel—one hundred thousand—and he paid for them one hundred talents; a talent of silver for each thousand men. His army was now very large—four hundred thousand.

He set out to go to Edom.

On the way he met a prophet. We know not his name.

The prophet said, 'O King, let not the army

of Israel go with thee, for the Lord is not with Israel.'

Who was on the throne of Israel at that time?

It was Joash, grandson of Jehu. It was he who visited Elisha on his death-bed, and showed he had no faith in God. It was with this Joash that God was angry.

The prophet went on to say to Amaziah, 'If thou wilt go, the Lord will make thee fall before the enemy, for God hath power to help and to cast down.'

Did Amaziah believe the Lord's message?

At first he thought of the money he had paid for the soldiers to the king of Israel, and he did not like to lose such a large sum; so he said to the man of God, 'What shall I do for the hundred talents of silver which I have given?'

The prophet answered, 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than that.'

Amaziah believed the prophet, and desired the army of Israel to go home without fighting. Thus that army would get paid without having been led to battle. Were they not glad of this?

Far from it; they were very angry. After they had got home—they fell in great fury on many cities of Judah, and killed the inhabitants.

What cruel men these Israelites were! It is a sign of a hard heart to delight in shedding blood.

We have heard much good of Amaziah, but

we must wait to hear whether his goodness continues. If he obeyed only from fear, his obedience was worth nothing, though he will be rewarded for doing what was right.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

AMAZIAH'S WAR AGAINST EDOM.

(2 CHRON. xxvi. 11–16.)

AMAZIAH and his army went on to the country of the Edomites. His reason for going against them was, that they had rebelled against him. For David had once conquered them, and they had been servants to Judah for a long while. This is what Isaac had said would happen. If you look in Gen. xxvii. you will see what Isaac said of Esau and his children the Edomites. It was not, therefore, wrong of Amaziah to go against them.

Amaziah found the Edomites among their high rocks, dwelling in houses cut out of the cliffs. They came down to meet Amaziah in the Valley of Salt. It was certain that he would conquer, because the prophet had assured him of victory. He went forth, therefore, full of hope, and met the enemies in the Valley of Salt, and conquered them there.

He killed ten thousand, and took ten thousand

prisoners. And now you shall hear what he did with his prisoners. He ordered his men to lead them to the top of a high rock and to hurl them down, that they might be dashed to pieces. Of course the soldiers had to tie the legs and arms of the poor creatures, in order to throw them over.

Was not this a barbarous and savage act?

Amaziah committed another great sin: he took home with him the idols of the Edomites, and he set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them, and burned incense to them. It would have been well if he had hurled them down from the top of the rock instead of the poor trembling prisoners.

How foolish it was to trust in the gods who could not save the Edomites, and how ungrateful to the God who had saved him!

The Lord was very angry with him for this great sin, and He sent a prophet to reprove him. We know not the prophet's name, or whether he was the same man who had reproved him before. The prophet said, 'Why hast thou sought after the gods who could not deliver their own people?'

The prophet had a great deal more to say to the king, but now the king would not hear. He had grown very proud of having conquered the Edomites, and he answered the prophet rudely, 'Who made you one of my advisers? Leave off, or you will be punished.'

The prophet did leave off, nor do we read of any more prophets coming to Amaziah; but as this prophet was going away he uttered one word of warning,—

'I know that God is determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.'

The evil thing he had done was worshipping idols, but if he had repented he might have been forgiven.

How miserable the prophet's words must have made Amaziah! but they did not soften his heart.

CHAPTER XCIX.

DEATH OF AMAZIAH.

(2 KINGS, xiv. 8–15. 2 CHRON. xxv. 27, 28.)

AMAZIAH returned from Edom in a very proud spirit. He showed his pride by his way of treating the prophet who rebuked him for his idolatry; he showed it again by sending this message to the king of Israel,—

'Come, let us look one another in the face.'

The meaning of the message was, 'Let us see one another in battle.'

Why did he wish to fight? You remember that the Israelites he had sent back had been so

angry that they had destroyed many cities of Judah.

The king of Israel at this time was Joash, grandson of Jehu. It was he who once visited Elisha on his death-bed, and who had shown so little faith in striking the arrows. This Joash was offended at Amaziah's message, and he sent back a little parable as his answer.

The parable was: 'A thistle that grew on Mount Lebanon said to a great cedar-tree, "Give thy daughter as a wife for my son;" and a wild beast passed by and trod down the thistle.'

Do you understand the parable? Joash meant to say that Amaziah was a poor little king like a thistle, and that he himself was like a fine cedar, and that it was proud of Amaziah to speak of meeting him in battle; it was like a thistle asking a cedar to let his daughter marry the thistle's son. By the wild beast he meant that any army could destroy Amaziah.

This was a proud answer, and showed that Joash was as proud as Amaziah.

But the end of the message was good. He said to Amaziah, 'Thy heart is lifted up, because thou hast destroyed Edom. But why shouldest thou fall, and Judah with thee?'

Amaziah would not hear this message. He was determined to fight, and he said so.

Therefore Joash led his army towards Judah, and he arrived at a city called Beth-Shemesh, only fifteen miles distant from Jerusalem.

Amaziah went there to meet his enemy. So he did look him in the face as he had wished. But it was not a pleasant look, for Amaziah was conquered, and his men fled to their tents. He himself was seized and brought as a prisoner to his own city, Jerusalem.

The words of the prophet were beginning to be fulfilled, 'I know that God hath determined to destroy thee.'

Amaziah's pride was now brought low. The conqueror of Edom was now the captive of Israel.

Joash broke down a good part of the wall of Jerusalem to make an entrance for his army. He took away all the gold and silver out of the temple and the palace. However, he left Amaziah in Jerusalem and returned to Samaria.

Nothing but trouble came upon this once proud king of Judah. He had turned away from following the Lord, and his people turned away from honouring him. They made a plan or conspiracy to murder him. He heard of it, and fled to a city a little way off, called Lachish. But men were sent there to kill him. Like his father, he was killed by his own servants.

However, he was brought by horses to Jerusalem, and buried in the city of David.

Every one must see a great likeness between the characters of the father and son, Joash and Amaziah. Both seemed good at first, and did right things; then turned to idols, and resisted

the prophets of God. Both were overcome by enemies, and slain by their own people. It is sad, indeed, to begin well and to end ill. It would be better never to know the way of righteousness than to turn from it afterwards.

If you ask, Was Solomon like these kings? No; for though he also turned to idols, he really loved the Lord; so the Lord punished him, but He did not take away His mercy from him. We do not know whether these kings found mercy, or whether they ever really loved the Lord.

CHAPTER C.

THE REIGN OF UZZIAH, SOMETIMES CALLED AZARIAH.

(2 Chron. xxvi. 1–16.)

The eldest son of Amaziah was named Uzziah. He was a youth of sixteen. Though the people turned against Amaziah, they were in favour of his son.

We have often seen that when a king of Israel was slain his murderer became king after him. But this never happened with a king of Judah. Even when the people rebelled against him, they placed his son on the throne.

What was the reason of this? It was because

God had chosen the sons of David to be kings of Judah. There is even now a Son of David who is king of Judah, but that Son is waiting in heaven, at God's right hand.

This new king of Judah was very wise, though so young. He showed his wisdom by making his kingdom as strong as he could. He broke down the walls of the cities of the Philistines, and he built up the walls of his own cities. You remember that Joash, king of Israel, had broken down part of the wall of Jerusalem. Uzziah built it up, and made strong towers.

He got together very strong soldiers, and gave them swords, spears, and shields, and bows and slings, and he placed round Jerusalem engines that clever men had invented for hurling great stones. But he was not fond of war. What he loved was husbandry, or cultivating the ground. He employed men to till the ground and to plant vines on the mountains, and he kept vast herds of cattle in the open country.

Many nations heard of the good plans of Uzziah. God helped him wonderfully, and made him a very powerful, rich king.

While Uzziah took so much pains to make his people happy in this world—he taught them also to serve the Lord in His temple. But he was not such a king as Jehoshaphat had been, who sent good men all over the land to read God's word. He let his people offer sacrifices on the hills, though he served the Lord himself.

CHAPTER CI.

THE DEATH OF UZZIAH.

(2 CHRON. xxvi. 5, 16–23.)

ONE reason that Uzziah served the Lord in his youth was this: There was a great prophet called Zechariah, who had many visions from God. His prophecies, however, are not written in the Bible.*

Zechariah encouraged Uzziah to seek the Lord. At last Zechariah died.

Then Uzziah left off seeking the Lord. All the time he had seemed good—he was growing proud. All the good he had done to his kingdom, and all the praises he had received from other nations, had puffed him up, and his heart was lifted up to his destruction. He thought hmself so great that he might do all he liked, and be priest as well as king.

None but the priests were allowed to enter the temple itself. Every one else, even the king, might worship only in the courts.

In the temple there was the table of shew-

* Another prophet lived long afterwards, whose name was Zechariah, and it is *his* prophecies that are written in the Bible.

bread, the golden candlestick, and the golden altar of incense.

One day Uzziah entered the temple, intending to burn incense upon the golden altar. The high-priest, who was named Azariah, saw him go in. He followed him in, accompanied by eighty brave priests. They found him with his censer in his hand offering incense. They spake boldly to him.

'It is not your place, Uzziah, to offer incense. It is for the priests, the sons of Aaron, to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for thou hast sinned against the Lord.'

The king minded not what the priests said, but went on offering incense, and feeling very angry at being reproved.

But suddenly, what did he feel burning in his forehead? and what did the priests see breaking out upon his bold brow?

THE LEPROSY—the horrible leprosy! The king felt it; the priests saw it. Immediately they drove him out, and he himself hastened to go out, for he knew that the Lord Himself had smitten him for his sin.

Nor did he ever come into the temple again, though he lived many years after; for a leper might not enter into the house of the Lord. Neither did he any more return to his palace, for his presence would have made it unclean. He had to spend the rest of his days in a house all alone, or with other lepers like himself. None

but the priests were allowed to talk to him. Perhaps their words were blessed to his soul; and perhaps, like Solomon, he repented; but we do not know that he did.

Many kings have repented when shut up, and such kings are far happier than those who die impenitent in their palaces.

Uzziah could no longer govern his kingdom, but he had a good son, who lived in the palace, and who ruled over the people.

Uzziah was called king for fifty-two years. He was sixty-eight when he died. His people buried him with his fathers in the *field* of the kings, but not in the *tombs* of the kings, for they said, 'He is a leper.'

CHAPTER CII.

THE REIGN OF JOTHAM.

(2 Chron. xxvii.)

It is a long time since we have heard of a king who could be called really good.

The three we have just read of seemed at first as if they were good, but they all grew proud at last, and fell into grievous sins. Joash became an idolater, and so did Amaziah; and Uzziah profaned the temple of the Lord.

The last really good king we have heard of—was Jehoshaphat, who had lived one hundred and thirty years before.

The son of Uzziah was called Jotham. He was very young when his father was made a leper. As Uzziah could not manage the affairs of his kingdom in his leprous state, his young son undertook the care of the nation. We call a man who rules for another 'Regent.' This is what Jotham was.

Perhaps, seeing his father so severely punished for his great sin had a good effect upon Jotham's young mind.

Though good himself, Jotham could not prevent the people worshipping idols, and sacrificing on high places, instead of coming to Jerusalem. No doubt those people liked too well the wild dances, and wicked songs, and rich wines of the idol feasts.

They must have been in a very bad state, for it was one hundred and thirty years, you know, since their pious king Jehoshaphat had died. And after his death, what horribly wicked monarchs had reigned!—Jehoram, Athaliah, and Ahaziah.

Though Jotham could not succeed in reforming the people, he was very successful in repairing the city. He built up the high gate of the house of the Lord, and he built towers on the walls of Jerusalem. On the mountains and in the forests he built castles and towers.

He conquered the king of the Ammonites, and made him pay a large sum of money, and quantities of corn every year, for three years. Thus Jotham became mighty, for his people were well fed, and his enemies subdued.

And all this prosperity was given to him as a blessing from the Lord, because he took much pains to obey the Lord, and to act as in His sight.

Yet his reign was short, only sixteen years. He was but forty-one when he died. It may be —the Lord took him away from the evil to come; for terrible enemies were appointed by God to punish the people for their idolatry.

Jotham was honourably buried with the kings in the city of David.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE REIGN OF AHAZ.

(2 Kings, xvi. 1–4. 2 Chron. xxviii. 1–4. Isa. vii.)

The son of Jotham was twenty-one years old when his father died. His name was Ahaz.

One might expect that he would be good, as his father gave him a good example; and his grandfather Uzziah was a warning to him, having

suffered a dreadful punishment. Ahaz must often have heard of Uzziah's leprosy.

Yet as soon as he was king—he did everything he possibly could to insult the Lord. He worshipped the cruel idol Moloch (or Baal). To please Moloch he burned some of his children, and he made his son pass through the fire. We are not sure whether he made him walk through the very fire, or between two fires. Whichever way it was, the child must have been hurt and terrified. But Ahaz cared more for his idol than for his son : and he made him pass through the fire, to show that he gave him up to Moloch to be his servant.

Ahaz sacrificed and burnt incense to idols on the hills, and under every green tree.

Soon after he had become king—a great trouble was sent by God. Two kings with great armies came to Jerusalem, and encamped round the walls. One of these kings you have heard of before.

His name was Pekah, king of Israel (the last but one). This Pekah had reigned long, and had fought much. It was strange that he should now go to war, when he had lost so many cities in his own land. He had got another king to assist him. That king was Rezin. He was king of Syria, where Ben-hadad once reigned. His chief city was Damascus. You must remember that Syria was but a little country compared with the great and terrible Assyria.

A message came to king Ahaz, saying, 'Syria and Israel are joined together against you.'

Ahaz and his people were much alarmed; for they had no God to go to in trouble.

Have you seen a high wind blowing about the trees? Did you observe how the trees bent beneath the wind, bowing down their tall heads, and then raising them again—only to bow them down again? In this way the hearts of the king and his people were shaken with fear.

Would God send comfort to this wicked king? He is merciful, even to sinners, and He tried this wicked king, to see whether he would turn and repent.

A comforter came to him.

Such a comforter! Not an angel, but one of the greatest prophets who ever lived. His words are the finest poetry that ever was written. This prophet was Isaiah.

God spoke to Isaiah, saying, 'Go and meet Ahaz.' God told Isaiah the place where he was to meet him, for God knew exactly where Ahaz was going in his fright. It was a place in Jerusalem, where a stream of water was flowing through a field (called the Fullers' Field, because a fuller whitened clothes there).

It was not a pleasant command for Isaiah to meet the wicked king. But he set out, and he took his little boy with him, for God had told him to take him.

He found the frightened king in the very place, and he said to him,—

'Take heed and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted.'

Then Isaiah told Ahaz that the two kings coming against him were like firebrands or torches, and that they were almost burnt out, and that only the tails were smoking. Isaiah assured him that the two kings would soon be destroyed.

You know that Israel was very soon destroyed, for Pekah was the last king but one. Syria also was destroyed very soon.*

Ahaz would have been delivered from both these enemies, if he had trusted in the Lord.

Isaiah said, 'Ask a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.'

How very kind it was of God to let Ahaz ask a sign, that he might be sure that God would do as He had promised. Ahaz might have asked for a sign on the earth, such as a mountain shaking; or he might have asked for a sign in heaven, such as light in the night, or darkness

* 'Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, soon afterwards slew Resin, king of Syria, in battle, took Damascus (2 Kings, xvi. 9), and put an end to the kingdom of the Syrians, though there had been kings in Damascus since the time of Solomon. The first and last king of Syria were named Resin.'—Bishop Lowth.

in the day. But he would ask for NOTHING. He did not believe in God, nor did he wish to believe. So he said, 'I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.'

To ask a sign would not have been 'tempting' the Lord; but *not* asking was tempting the Lord.

God was very angry, and said He would only give him one sign.

What was it? 'A virgin shall bear a son, and call his name Immanuel,' (which means 'God with us').

What a wonderful sign that was! the Son of God was born into the world, and was the baby of a poor woman!

But Ahaz never saw that sign, for seven hundred and forty years were to pass away before Jesus would come.

Then Isaiah told Ahaz that God would not deliver him from the two kings, and that their kingdoms, Israel, and Syria, would soon be destroyed by the great king of Assyria, reigning at Nineveh.

In Ahaz we see how dreadful is the sin of unbelief. He would have been delivered if he had believed, but through not believing he lost the favour of God.

CHAPTER CIV.

THE DEATH OF AHAZ.

(2 Chron. xxviii. 4–27. 2 Kings, xvi. 6–19.)

Ahaz had refused to believe in the Lord, or to listen to the voice of the prophet Isaiah. All kinds of troubles soon came upon him.

Who were the two kings of whom he was so much afraid?

Pekah and Rezin. Both these kings did him great harm. Pekah came into Judah and slew one hundred and twenty thousand men. Never had so many men ever been slain before at one time in the Lord's land. Pekah took back with him two hundred thousand prisoners.

Do you remember how God delivered all these prisoners?

He sent a prophet named Oded, to command the princes of Samaria to send them back to Jerusalem. Perhaps Pekah would not have sent them back; but the princes obeyed the prophet, and sent the captives home, well clothed and well fed.

They arrived in Jericho, the city of Judah nearest to Samaria. The children came riding upon asses, as well as the sick people.

* A particular account of the captives' return is given in Chapter LXXXI. of this work. It is there related under the head of Pekah's reign.

Did this merciful deliverance soften the hard heart of King Ahaz?

No: he remained as ungodly as ever.

His other enemy, Rezin, king of Syria, did him much harm, and carried away a great multitude of captives to Damascus; and these captives did not return home, like the captives that had been going to Samaria.

The Edomites also came and took away captives; and the Philistines came and settled in many of the towns of Judah.

The Lord sent all these enemies against Ahaz because of his great sins;—but nothing made him turn to the Lord.

Ahaz, feeling he wanted some help, sent to the king of Assyria, the great king at Nineveh. His name was Tiglath-pileser (or Lord of Tigris). Pul was now dead. It was very wicked of Ahaz to send to the king of Assyria for help; for God had told Ahaz that Assyria was the nation that would destroy Judah. But Ahaz believed nothing that God said.

Ahaz sent this message to Tiglath-pileser: 'I am thy servant and thy SON. Come up and save me from Pekah and Rezin.'

What! did Ahaz call himself the SON of this heathen king? This was a worse sin than Ahab committed when he said, 'My brother Ben-hadad.'

Ahaz knew that the Assyrian king would not help him unless he gave him some money.

Ahaz easily got gold and silver; for he took what was found in the house of the Lord and in his own house, and sent a fine present to Tiglath.

So the king of Assyria, to oblige Ahaz, attacked Syria. He went to Damascus and conquered it, and slew Rezin.

Did Ahaz thank Tiglath-pileser for helping him so much? Yes, he did.

He went to meet him at Damascus. There he saw an altar that he admired very much; so he had a model made of it. The model was a little altar just like it. He sent the model to the high-priest at Jerusalem, and he told him to make a large altar just like the altar at Damascus.

Urijah was the name of the high-priest. He did what the king commanded, and made an altar: it was finished by the time that Ahaz returned from Damascus. When the king saw the altar, he offered a sacrifice upon it. This was a great sin, for none, except priests, were allowed to sacrifice, and no altar but one was allowed to be used. But Ahaz cared not for God's commands.

He desired the old brazen altar to be moved from its place, to make room for his new large altar; he desired Urijah to offer all the sacrifices upon the new altar, and to leave the old one to be used in some other way. He made free with everything in the temple; he even took away the twelve brazen oxen, on which the great bath stood; and he built altars

in every corner of Jerusalem, and in all the cities.

Thus he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger by his sins.

The Lord cut him off in the flower of his days, at the age of thirty-six, after a reign of sixteen years. His people would not bury him with the kings, though they let him have a tomb in Jerusalem. He was well punished for applying to the king of Assyria for help, as that king did him no good, but only made him poorer and more wretched.

CHAPTER CV.

REIGN OF HEZEKIAH.

(2 KINGS, xviii. 1–7. 2 CHRON. xxix. xxx. xxxi.)

EVERY ONE would expect that so wicked a man as Ahaz would have a bad son; but it was not so. Though he had seen so bad an example in his father, Hezekiah began his reign by doing all that was right. Perhaps his mother Abijah of Jerusalem, had taught him about God; perhaps his grandfather Jotham had talked to him when he was a little boy; perhaps the old prophet Isaiah had been his friend from his childhood. But, whoever had led him right on earth, we

know that God from heaven really made him what he was,—a good king. He was better than any other king of Judah,—better than Asa, or Jehoshaphat, or Jotham: he was as good as David. Like David, he trusted in the Lord.

As soon as he came to the throne he sought the glory of God by destroying all idols. His grandfather Jotham had not done this. Though he worshipped God himself, he had let his people go on worshipping idols on the high places. Perhaps he had been afraid of offending his people. But Hezekiah was afraid of no one but God. He began by taking away the high places, breaking images, and cutting down the groves. His people must have felt very angry when he took away the idols they delighted in. But Hezekiah went on doing what was right.

Amongst the idols—he found a very remarkable thing: it was a serpent of brass. Who had made it? Moses. Now the people worshipped it.

Would Hezekiah destroy what Moses had made?

O yes! It was become an idol, and the people burned incense before it: so Hezekiah broke it in pieces, and said, 'It is only a piece of brass'—which is, in Hebrew, 'Nehushtan.'

Hezekiah longed to assemble with his people in the temple, but he could not do so, for the temple was in a very sad condition: it was filled with rubbish, filth, and idols.

The king felt that his first duty was to have

it cleansed. New-year's Day was the day he chose for beginning this great work. The Jewish New-year's Day is in the middle of March.

Then he called together the priests and Levites. He did not ask them to come into the temple courts, but to come into a street close by. Then he told the priests to cleanse the inside of the temple, and to let the Levites carry out the filth and throw it in the brook Kedron.

It took quite a fortnight to cleanse the temple and the courts. That Syrian altar that, Ahaz thought so beautiful, was taken away, as rubbish.

At the end of a fortnight the priests and Levites came and told the king that all was now cleansed. The king was very much pleased to hear this.

The next day was a grand day indeed, for the king rose early and went up to the house of the Lord.

The priests were there to offer sacrifices for the sins of the nation. The Levites were there to play music, and to sing the praises of God.

And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded.

This was a most joyful day, and the king rejoiced, and all the people.

Then Hezekiah determined to keep the passover; so he sent messengers all over the land. These messengers were called 'runners;' they did

not go on horseback, but ran very fast. These running messengers went to the cities of Israel, entreating the ten tribes to come up to Jerusalem. They read aloud Hezekiah's letter, but most of the people mocked and sneered, and would not come; a few, however, were of a different spirit, and they did come.

There was a joyful passover this year; there had not been such an one since the days of Solomon. The people enjoyed it so much, that when the week of the passover was over—they wished to stay another week; and they did so. The king and the princes gave thousands of bullocks and sheep for peace-offerings. The greater part of those offerings were eaten by the people.

But the people had more pleasures—besides these feasts; for the Levites taught them the good knowledge of the Lord, and to sing His praises in lovely psalms.

The happy fortnight ended by the priests standing up and blessing the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to heaven. So we know that they prayed from their hearts.

There was great joy in Jerusalem at this feast.

CHAPTER CVI.

HEZEKIAH'S ALARM.

(2 CHRON. xxxii. 1–9. 2 KINGS, xviii. 13–17.)

You have heard of the way in which Hezekiah began his reign. As he began, so he went on.

Was he happy in his way of life?

It is written, 'The Lord was with him, and he prospered wherever he went.' The Lord delights in making His servants happy.

You have not forgotten how Ahaz had consented to serve the king of Assyria, and had said, 'I am thy servant and thy son. Come up and save me from Syria and Israel.' He had paid money to the king of Assyria year by year.

But when Hezekiah became king, he refused to pay any more money, or to serve the king of Assyria. In this he did right. He himself had made no promise to serve the king of Assyria, and he was not obliged to keep the wicked promises his father had made.

Hezekiah had a war with the Philistines. He knew they had no right to live in the land, and he tried to turn them out of their cities.

While Hezekiah went on reigning in peace and plenty, very dreadful events happened in Samaria.

Shalmanezer was now king of Assyria. He came up against Samaria, conquered and carried King Hoshea into captivity, with many of his people—never to return.

This was the end of the kingdom of Israel, and of the ten tribes. You have lately read the sad history.

Soon afterwards Shalmanezer died, and his son reigned over Assyria. This son's name was Sennacherib. He was a great warrior, like his father. All the kings of the nations were afraid of him.

Soon Hezekiah heard that Sennacherib had entered Judah. He heard next—that Sennacherib was trying to take the cities which had towers and walls.

'He will soon come to Jerusalem,' thought Hezekiah. So he consulted his princes and his great lords about what it would be best to do. They determined to stop a stream that ran outside the city. They made it flow underground into Jerusalem; for they said, 'Why should the Assyrians find water when they come?' They hoped that thirst would make them die or go away.

Then Hezekiah desired the walls to be built up higher and stronger, and he caused a quantity of darts and shields to be made.

However, he saw that his people were in great terror. He invited all the soldiers to assemble in the street, and then he spoke to them comfort-

ably, saying, 'Be strong and very courageous. Do not be afraid of the king of Assyria and his great army; for there be more with *us* than with *him*.' He meant, that angels were on his side, and that God Himself would fight his battles.

The people were much comforted by these words; for they trusted in the king's words.

Soon the king heard that Sennacherib had taken many cities of Judah; and now his courage failed, and his faith became weak. It is easy to *think* we trust in God when there is only a little danger; but when danger comes nearer and nearer, how hard it is to trust!

So Hezekiah found it to be.

In his fear he sent this message to Sennacherib at Lachish (a town about thirty miles from Jerusalem): 'I have offended. Go away from me. I will pay as much money as you please.' Hezekiah meant, that he had offended in not going on paying what his father Ahaz paid.

You may be sure that the king of Assyria asked for a great deal of silver and gold. Hezekiah gave him all the *silver* in his palace and in the temple. But he was at a loss how to get *gold*. Then he remembered that there was gold in the temple and on the pillars. He had overlaid some of them with gold himself. Now he cut off all the gold, and sent it to Sennacherib. He must have felt very sad as he did this. He acted now a little like his father, who had said to Shalmanezer, 'I am thy servant and *thy son*.' But

he was not like his father Ahaz in his heart: for he was a true child of God, though his faith was shaken in his great alarm.

CHAPTER CVII.

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS.

(2 KINGS, xx. 1–12.)

ABOUT this time Hezekiah became very ill—so ill that every one thought he would die.

We have seen that Hezekiah's faith had grown weak, and perhaps God sent this sickness to make it stronger.

While the king was lying on his sick bed, the prophet Isaiah entered his room. This prophet was his great friend.

Did he come to comfort him?

No. This was his message: 'Thus saith the Lord: Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.'

This was indeed a terrible message! 'Set thine house in order' meant, that Hezekiah should arrange everything before he died.

Could there be any hope of his life, after God had said that he should die?

It seemed as if there could be no hope. But

Hezekiah had still some hope that he might live, if he prayed.

So he turned his face to the wall, and offered up this prayer: 'I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember now—how I have walked before Thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight.'

While the king prayed he shed many tears.

What do you think of his prayer? Did he not think too much of his own goodness? It would have been better to confess his sin. Did he forget how he had behaved lately to Sennacherib? To him he had said, 'I have offended,' when he had not done wrong. He might more truly say to God, 'I have offended.'

His faith was weak, and his heart was too well satisfied with himself. Yet he was really a true servant of God, and he hoped to do more good to his people, if he lived longer.

Do you wonder that he was so anxious to live?

Before Jesus came, His people did not know so much about the glory on high* as they do now. They did not feel that it was better to depart and to be with Jesus.

Hezekiah was right in thinking that God would hear his prayer.

Isaiah had gone only a little way from the

* 'Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.'—2 Tim. i. 10.

palace, and was still in the courts, when God spoke to him again.

Isaiah turned and went back to the palace. Surely his look must have been different from what it had been when he had come with the message of death?

Now he stood by the bed, and said, 'Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father: I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee. On the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord.'

How very soon the king was to be well, after such a dangerous illness!

Then the prophet said a wonderful thing: he told Hezekiah how long he would live.

Did any one else ever know how long he would live?

No, not one, except Jesus, when He was on earth.

God said, 'I will add unto thy days fifteen years.'

Then Isaiah told the king of a great promise that God had made: 'I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria.'

We know how much alarmed the king had been. Now he had a promise that he might trust in.

Isaiah said also, 'Take a lump of figs.' The servants took the lump, and laid it on the boil.

Then Hezekiah made a request to the prophet. He said, 'What sign will the Lord give

me that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord on the third day?'

Hezekiah was not at all like his father Ahaz, who would not have a sign when the Lord offered to give him a sign. The reason was—Ahaz did not wish to believe, but Hezekiah did wish it.

Then Isaiah gave the king his choice between two signs.

There was a sun-dial near the palace, once placed there by Ahaz. On a sun-dial the hours are written as on a clock; and when the sun shines, a shadow is made to fall upon the hour on the dial to show what o'clock it is.

Isaiah asked Hezekiah whether the shadow should go backwards or go forwards? Hezekiah said, 'Let the shadow go backward;' for that would be a much greater wonder than going forward.

The Lord gave him this sign; and Hezekiah grew well, as God had said, and he went up to the house of the Lord on the third day.

This was like Jesus rising on the third day from his tomb, as Hezekiah rose from his sick bed to praise the Lord.

CHAPTER CVIII.

THE MESSENGERS FROM BABYLON TO HEZEKIAH.

(2 KINGS, xx. 12–20.)

WHEN Hezekiah had recovered from his sickness he felt very grateful, and went up to the house of the Lord.

He wrote also a beautiful song about his illness. He compared himself to a bird, called the crane, who has the loudest voice of any bird for his size. Like the crane, he said, he had howled in his illness; like the swallow, he had chattered; like the dove, he had mourned. Then he described the Lord's goodness: 'Thou hast in love to my soul delivered me from the pit of corruption: Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.'

We see from these words that Hezekiah now mourned for his sins, though he had spoken so much about his goodness when he prayed in his bed.

Hezekiah's song was set to music, and it was sung in the house of the Lord as long as Hezekiah lived. Stringed instruments, such as harps and lutes, were played to accompany the singers.

But though Hezekiah was so grateful to God, —pride was hidden in his heart. God made an event to happen which caused the pride to show itself.

There was a country called Babylon. Its chief city was also called Babylon.

This city was built on the river Euphrates. Babylon at this time was not so great a city as Nineveh, nor was the king of Babylon so great as the king of Assyria.

If you look at the map you will see the two rivers, Euphrates and Tigris, with the two great cities, Babylon and Nineveh, built on them.

The king of Babylon was very friendly to Hezekiah. His name was Berodach-Baladan, after his idols.

He heard of Hezekiah's recovery from his sickness, and of the wonder done upon the sun-dial. Therefore he sent messengers to Hezekiah, with a kind letter and a handsome present. The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem was very long—five hundred miles.

Hezekiah received the messengers in a friendly way. This was right. But he did more than that. He wished the king of Babylon to help him in war, if the king of Assyria should come against him once more: so he showed the messengers the house where all his treasures were stored up; and he took them into another house where his armour was kept, and his shields, and swords, and spears. There was nothing he had that he did not show them, whether silver, gold, spices, or precious ointment.

He hoped that the messengers would tell their master what a rich king Hezekiah was. He had

been still richer, before he gave all his silver to Sennacherib: but since that time he had got more silver.

When the messengers were gone back to Babylon, a faithful friend came to Hezekiah's palace. It was the prophet Isaiah.

He was a messenger, not from Babylon, but from Heaven. He was come from God with these questions to the king:

'What said those men? Where did they come from?'

Hezekiah did not answer the first question, because the men had said something about helping Hezekiah, and Hezekiah had listened to them, which he knew was wrong. He answered the second question, and said:

'They came from a far country, even from Babylon.'

Then Isaiah asked a third question: 'What have they seen in thy house?'

Hezekiah answered, 'Everything.' This was true.

But Hezekiah did not, it seems, know how proud he was in showing his treasures; for he expressed no sorrow for what he had done.

But Isaiah answered: 'Hear the word of the Lord. The days come that all in thy house and in thy storehouses—shall be carried into Babylon. Nothing shall be left. And thy children's children shall they take away, and make them slaves to the king of Babylon.'

This came quite true a hundred years after-

wards. Daniel was one of the royal family, who was then taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar.

How did Hezekiah receive the message of wrath?

He took it well — saying, 'Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. Is it not good — if peace and truth shall be in my days?'

This was a meek and humble answer, and showed Hezekiah to be a man of God. He was not angry with Isaiah for bringing the message.

No doubt he thought a great deal afterwards about his pride. Why had he not spoken to the men of Babylon of his God? He might have done so. King Solomon spake much about his God to the Queen of Sheba, when she came from a far country.

When people come to see us, we should be more ready to praise God than to show off our fine things, and make them admire us.

We shall find that Hezekiah became much more humble after his sin.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE MESSENGERS FROM ASSYRIA TO HEZEKIAH.

(2 Kings, xviii. 17 to end; xix. 1–8.)

Do you remember that God had promised to deliver Hezekiah from the Assyrians?

This was the joyful message that Isaiah had brought him in his sickness:

'I will add unto thy days fifteen years, and I will deliver *thee* and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria.'

We shall now hear how God fulfilled His promise.

Sennacherib had once gone away from the land, but he was now returned. He laid siege to a town called Lachish, about twenty miles off Jerusalem, and he sent three very great captains, with a very great army, to fight against Hezekiah.

When they were close to Jerusalem the three captains stood near a stream of water on a road through a field. They boldly called out for the king. But he would not come. He sent instead three of his chief men. So there were three Assyrians and three Jews, talking together.

The three Assyrians were named Tartan, Rab-saris, and Rab-shakeh. This last was the greatest speaker.

The three Jews were Eliakim, Shebnah, and Joah. They were not captains: one was the king's steward, and the others were writers. Eliakim the steward was a man who feared God.

Rab-shakeh spoke to them in a bold, profane, mocking manner. His whole speech was a message to Hezekiah, telling him not to trust in his God.

The three Jews were grieved at his words. They entreated Rab-shakeh not to speak in the

Jews' language, so that the people on the wall should understand. But this request made Rab-shakeh bolder than before.

He said, 'I want most to speak to the men who sit on the wall.'

Then Rab-shakeh stood up and spoke in a very loud voice to the men on the wall, in the Jews' language, saying, 'Hear the words of the GREAT king, the king of Assyria. Let not Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord. Hearken not to Hezekiah when he says, "The Lord will deliver us." For the king of Assyria says, Come out to me, and every one of you shall eat of his own vine, and of his own fig-tree, and I will come and take you away to a land like your own land — a land of corn and wine,— of oil and honey.

Then Rab-shakeh stood and asked the people this question: 'Have the gods of other countries delivered the people out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Why, then, should your God deliver Jerusalem?'

No one answered this question, for Hezekiah had said to his people, when they were going to see Rab-shakeh, 'Answer him not.' So all the people were silent.

Neither did the three good men answer any more, for they saw it was of no use.

So they went back to the city with their clothes all torn, to show their grief.

When Hezekiah heard what Rab-shakeh had said — he also tore his clothes, and covered himself

with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. But he sent these three men to the house of the prophet Isaiah. Some of the chief priests went with them. They were all clothed in sackcloth.

They brought a message from their king to the prophet, saying 'Pray for us.'

Isaiah had a message all ready from the Lord. It was this: 'Say to your master, Be not afraid of the words of the Assyrians. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will send a blast, and he shall hear a rumour, and he shall return to his own land; and he shall fall by the sword in his own land.'

This was a wonderful prophecy. There was to be a *blast;* that blast was the blast of death, killing the Assyrian army.

And what was to be the rumour (or noise)?

That rumour was to be the report that enemies were come, so that Sennacherib would return to his own land, and be slain there by his own sons.

All this would happen; but first Hezekiah must wait, and his people must wait. The Lord would certainly deliver them soon.

While waiting, Hezekiah and Isaiah continued to pray and to cry to God in Heaven.

CHAPTER CX.

DESTRUCTION OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMY,

IN THE REIGN OF HEZEKIAH.

(2 KINGS, xix. 8 to end.)

THE first good news that Hezekiah heard was that Rab-shakeh had gone away from Jerusalem.

Rab-shakeh went away, intending to return soon. He knew that Sennacherib wanted his help against the king of Ethiopia, and therefore he went. So these two wicked scoffers met together again—Sennacherib and his captain, Rab-shakeh.

Theirs was a wicked friendship; just the contrary of Hezekiah's friendship for the prophet Isaiah.

As Sennacherib was still unable to come, he sent a letter to Hezekiah—just like Rab-shakeh's speech.

Some messengers brought it to Hezekiah for him to read.

When Hezekiah had read it—he took it to the house of the Lord and spread it before His God. Then he prayed, saying, 'Lord, bow down Thine ear and hear; open Thine eyes and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib. Save us, O Lord, that

all the kingdoms may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only.'

After this faithful, fervent prayer, a message came from Isaiah. It was to say, 'The Lord has heard thy prayer. Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor cast a bank against it. For I will defend this city, to save it—for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake.'

This was a most wonderful promise: for Sennacherib, with his large army, was a very little way off, and there was nothing to prevent his coming close to it, and making banks and shooting arrows next day.

But in the night an event came to pass which prevented Sennacherib laying siege to Jerusalem.

HIS ARMY DIED!!!

How was this?

In the night an angel came and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in their beds, or, it may be, standing on their watch.

The angel came so silently, in the stillness of the night, and he smote the men so suddenly, that none of the other soldiers knew what had happened. The dying had not screamed or struggled—so as to awake their fellow-soldiers: and when their fellow-soldiers awoke next morning they were astonished to find dead corpses in every tent.

Those who awoke that morning—were too few to attack Jerusalem. Therefore none shot an arrow there, or cast a bank against it, as God had said.

Sennacherib was not amongst the slain, and he set out with his few followers to return to his own land.

Where was Rab-shakeh? Perhaps among the slain—but we know not.

How wonderful it must have seemed to Hezekiah to see his prayer so suddenly answered. God had said of Sennacherib, 'He shall not come into this city,' and he came not.

What did Sennacherib think of the Lord's deliverance? He did not believe that the Lord had slain his army; therefore he went on worshipping his own idols, the same as ever, in Nineveh.

Once, when worshipping his god Nisroch, his two elder sons rose up and killed him with their swords. When they had done the dreadful deed they were alarmed, and fled away to the mountains of Armenia.

His youngest son, Esar-haddon, reigned in his stead.

Isaiah's prophecy concerning Sennacherib was fulfilled: 'Behold, I will send a blast upon him.' This blast was the blast of death.

CHAPTER CXI.

THE REIGN OF MANASSEH.

(2 Chron. xxxii. 32, 33. 2 Kings, xxi. 1–17.)

It is remarkable that Hezekiah knew fifteen years before he died how many years he would have to live.

During those fifteen years his son was born. He had a wife named Heph-zi-bah (which means 'My delight is in her'), and she had a son whom Hezekiah called Manasseh, or 'Forgetting.' Perhaps he meant that this son made him forget his troubles, even as Joseph of old called his son Manasseh for that reason.

But had Hezekiah known how wicked that son would be he would not have counted him a blessing, but a curse.

Hezekiah died when the boy was only twelve years old. People always hope that a child of that age will become good when he is a man, but too often they are disappointed.

Hezekiah was much beloved by his people, and he was buried by them in the grandest of the tombs of the kings: he was honoured by all. They had reason to lament him, for he was the last good king (except one) that they would ever have.

Hezekiah was sixty when he died, having reigned thirty-five years.

Manasseh at first was under tutors and governors, but as soon as he was his own master he showed how wicked he was. He began by building up all the high places which his father had destroyed. Then he set up the worship of Baal, and filled the courts of the Lord with the altars of idols.

Still worse — he made his son to pass through the fire, to please his cruel god Moloch. What must the child have felt when driven through the flames! and how scorched he must have been when he came out!

You see that Manasseh was a cruel father, as well as an undutiful son.

Another great sin he committed—was dealing with the spirits of devils. He was familiar or intimate with devils. He prayed to them instead of God. He was friends with wicked men called wizards, who serve the devil, and ask him what will happen.

But of all the sins he committed, what could be so great as *this*—setting up an idol in the house of the Lord? His grandfather Ahaz did nothing quite so bad. He shut up the house of the Lord, and worshipped idols in all the streets of Jerusalem; but to turn the temple of God into a temple of Satan was more dreadful still.

Manasseh was worse than all the kings of

Judah: he was even worse than the Canaanites, who had lived in the land before the Israelites destroyed them under Joshua. He was worse than the kings of Israel, because none of them had a good father, as all were bad.

He was like Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, for he enticed his people to worship idols: though he had seen how God had punished the ten tribes, by taking them away into captivity.

There were several prophets in Jerusalem besides Isaiah. The Lord sent these prophets to warn Manasseh.

They told him that the Lord would punish *him*, as He had punished Samaria and the house of Ahab: they told him that the Lord would treat Jerusalem as a man treats a dish, when he turns it upside down, and lets all drop out of it, before he wipes it to make it clean.

But Manasséh was angry with these prophets, and shed their blood. It is supposed that he killed Isaiah by sawing him down his body, so as to divide it into two parts; but this is not certain, for it is not written in the Bible.

It must have been dreadful to walk down Jerusalem at this time and see the streams of blood and the crowd of idols.

CHAPTER CXII.

DEATH OF MANASSEH.

(2 CHRON. xxxiii. 11–21.)

WE do not know *how* long Manasseh went on in his wickedness. He reigned fifty-five years, so there was plenty of time for him to do wickedly.

For a long while Manasseh did not mind the words of the prophets; but he was made to mind at last. Great troubles came upon this proud sinner.

The greatest king in the world was the king of Assyria.

Sennacherib was dead.

Was Esar-haddon alive?

We do not know; we rather believe he was dead also.

But the Lord brought upon Manasseh the captains of a great Assyrian army. In his fright—Manasseh tried to hide himself in a thicket of thorny bushes. There the soldiers found him. They put chains on his feet (called fetters), and they carried him to Babylon as a prisoner.

Why did they not bring him to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria?

The Assyrians had already conquered Babylon, so they brought him to that city, so wondrous grand and strong.

How did Manasseh feel when plunged in a dungeon, or shut up in a prison?

He thought over his sins, and he REPENTED. He besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him.

We know that our God is merciful and gracious.

Manasseh may have heard Isaiah say at some time, 'Let the wicked man forsake his way, and let him turn unto the Lord and He will abundantly pardon.'

Manasseh was a wicked man, and the Lord did abundantly pardon him.

God might have pardoned him, and yet let him die in prison; but He chose to show Manasseh that He had heard his prayer. He let him return to his own land and palace, and throne and crown.

We do not know *how* the Lord brought him again to Jerusalem. Perhaps the king of Assyria had compassion on him. We know not. Back to his kingdom he came.

Did he then show that he had really repented? Yes, he did.

He had hard work to undo his wicked deeds.

The chief thing was to take that idol out of the house of the Lord, and to pull down the altars on Mount Zion, and to cast away all the false gods. He thought it enough to throw them away; it was a pity that he did not grind them to powder.

After having pulled down—he had to build up. He built again the altar of the Lord, and offered sacrifices on it. More than this,—he preached to his people, and exhorted them to serve the Lord.

How ashamed Manasseh must have been of his former sins! But it was right of him to stand up boldly and to speak for the Lord, though men might jeer and scoff at him.

But all he could say did not turn the people from sacrificing on the high places.

There were some things that Manasseh could not undo. He could not bring to life the prophets he had slain, and wash out the remembrance of their blood; nor could he restore the innocent children that he had offered to his gods. Their innocent blood brought down God's anger upon Jerusalem long after Manasseh was dead. Yet his sins were washed from his soul. He may once have heard Isaiah cry out, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.'

Manasseh did not forget to make the walls of Jerusalem strong to keep the Assyrians out; but no walls can keep out enemies, if the Lord is angry with a city.

When Manasseh died his people did not honour him with such a tomb as Hezekiah's. He was not buried among the kings, but only in the palace-garden, where the body of Uzziah the leper had once been laid. It may be that Uzziah also had repented. If so the two penitents lay together.

Manasseh reigned fifty-five years. He was sixty-seven when he died.

What a miserable man he had been! At first miserable in his sins, and afterwards miserable at the remembrance of all the evil he had done, and of the souls that he had ruined, and of the wrath he had brought upon Jerusalem.

Oh, children, so spend your lives that you may rejoice in your old age, if you live to be old.

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE REIGN OF AMON.

(2 KINGS, xxi. 19 to end.)

THE son of Manasseh was twenty-two years old at his father's death. Did he walk in his father's first ways, or in his last ways?

In his first ways.

He was without excuse for doing this, because he could never have seen his father's wickedness.

He only saw his repentance. We are not sure whether he was not born after Manasseh's return from Babylon.

The first thing this young sinner did was to restore the idols that his father had cast away.

Manasseh had made a mistake in only casting away his idols. He ought to have melted them, if they were of gold and silver;—he ought to have ground them to powder if they were of stone; and he ought to have burned them if they were of wood.

It would have grieved Manasseh if he had known that his son would find his idols and set them up again. Parents ought to take care to leave nothing behind them that can hurt their children's souls, or help their children to be wicked.

We do not know whether Amon was so bold, as to set up an idol in the temple, or whether he killed any of the prophets; perhaps there were none to kill, as Manasseh had killed so many.

But Amon had not much time for wickedness. When he had reigned only two years, his servants agreed together to kill him; and they slew him in his own house.

It was very wicked of them to slay their master;—more wicked far than if they had slain a stranger. But they did not escape punishment, for the people caused all these servants to be executed.

God soon cut short the life of this great sin-

ner—King Amon. He had preserved the life of Manasseh during many years of sin, while he speedily stops the breath of Amon. Yet Amon could not be worse than Manasseh once was. We cannot understand the Lord's ways. He shows mercy to some, while others He punishes as they deserve. He always does right, but He tells His reasons to none.

Amon was not honoured by his people, and he was not buried amongst the kings, but in the palace-garden. Three kings slept in those graves —the aged leper, the aged penitent, and the young sinner, only twenty-four years old.

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(2 CHRON. xxxiv. 1–7.)

AMON in dying left a little boy to reign after him. His name was Josiah. Should we not expect him to be bad like his father? He was only eight years old, and from the time he was six —he had seen the city full of idols, and his own father bowing down to them. But this child did not love idols, as we shall see.

It is interesting to behold a child with a crown upon his head. We have read of one king who

wore a crown at seven years old. Josiah was only one year older than Joash was when he was crowned. There never were any who wore David's crown when so young as these two. But how unlike they were!

Though Joash had been brought up in the temple by the holy priest and his wife, yet he only *seemed* good, and showed at last the wickedness hidden in his heart. But Josiah, though he had been brought up by an ungodly father, really loved God, and walked in His ways all his life long. It may be that Josiah's mother, Jedidah, was pious, but we know nothing about her. The grace of God made Josiah what he was.

When he was sixteen he began to seek after the Lord God of David his father; but he was not old enough then to give commands to his people. When he was twenty—he began his war against the idols.

There was hard work for him to do. The streets of Jerusalem were crowded with idols, and altars, and groves. Josiah had seen these images from his childhood. His chief men ought to have cut them down long ago. What were the priests about that they let them stay so long in the streets? But now their time was come. Josiah would have them destroyed. He was not content to *tell* his servants to destroy them, he saw them do it himself. He would spare nothing. Down every idol must come, however high it was stuck up. What confusion there

must have been in the streets! People who loved the idols must have been vexed that day. Josiah knew it was not enough to cast idols away,—he had them ground to powder; and he desired the powder to be strown upon the graves of the idolaters, that so no one might touch it again: for what was near the dead—was counted unclean.

He had more to do than that. There were priests who served the idols. What was to become of them? Put to death, and their bones burned upon the idol altars. This is what Josiah commanded to be done.

Having done all this, he set out upon a journey. It was a very holy journey, for it was taken for the glory of God. Josiah did not bring soldiers with him to look grand, or great lords to feast with him as he went along; but he took workmen with mattocks to break down the idols in the land of Israel. He went through the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon, even as high as Naphtali, beyond the lake of Gennesareth; and everywhere as he went his workmen with their mattocks battered down the idols—with mallets ground them to powder,—and with axes cut down the groves where the idols had been worshipped.

There was no king in Israel to hinder the good work. The last king—Hoshea—had been taken away a hundred years ago—a prisoner into Assyria; and now the land was inhabited by

heathen nations, who pretended to worship the God of Israel.

Yet they loved idols, and they must have been angry when they saw the king and his troop of men destroying their gods.

When the great work was done, Josiah returned to Jerusalem. How happy he must have felt at the thought that God was glorified by this journey!

CHAPTER CXV.

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH THE PROPHET,

IN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(JER. i.)

A GOOD king is a great blessing to a nation. Judah had this blessing. A good prophet is another great blessing. Had Judah *this* blessing?

Since Isaiah died, and other good prophets, in the reign of Manasseh, we have heard of none.

But just at the time that Josiah made that journey for the glory of God,—a youth was called to become a prophet. He was a priest, and he

lived in one of the priest's cities. There were thirteen of these cities where priests lived. This young priest lived at Anathoth, three miles from Jerusalem. He was much surprised when the Lord first spoke to him.

He said to the young priest, 'Jeremiah, before you were born I chose you to be a prophet to the nations.'

Was Jeremiah pleased to hear that he was to speak to the nations?

No; he was very much alarmed, and he said, 'Ah! Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.'

We do not know how old he was at this time. He may have been nearly the same age as Josiah, who was twenty.

The Lord spoke kindly to this good youth, and said,—

'Say not, I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee.' Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched his mouth.

By this touch—we see that it was the Lord Jesus who appeared to Jeremiah.

The Lord said to him as He touched him, 'Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.'

Then the Lord told him that he must throw down some nations, and build and plant other nations.

How could Jeremiah do such great things?

Jeremiah could not do these things, but he could declare that the Lord would do them.

Afterwards the Lord showed Jeremiah two sights.

The Lord said unto him, 'Jeremiah, what seest thou?'

He said, 'A branch of an almond-tree.'

Why did He show him an almond-tree?

Because it is the first of all the trees to have blossoms.

The almond-tree signified that God would make haste to punish Judah. The name of an almond-tree signifies 'haste,' in Hebrew. So when the Lord said, 'I will hasten my word,' it was as if He used the name of the tree, and had said, 'I will *almond* my word to perform it.'

This was a beautiful sign, the almond-tree. But the next was an ugly sign.

The Lord said, 'What seest thou?'

And Jeremiah answered, 'I see a boiling-pot, with the face (or spout) towards the north.'

What did that boiling-pot signify?

Jerusalem. She was the boiling-pot, and the fire underneath—was like God's wrath, and the fuel was like Babylon. Babylon lay to the north of Jerusalem. From Babylon would come the punishment of Jerusalem. Yes, Babylon would soon come with many other nations that served Babylon, and all these nations would come round Jerusalem to destroy it, because the people had forsaken God and burned incense to idols.

This was the message that Jeremiah had to deliver to the Jews. Well might he be afraid to deliver it,—so young and tender as he was. He knew he should be scoffed at, frowned upon, spoken against, and almost killed.

But God comforted him by saying, 'I am with thee to deliver thee.'

CHAPTER CXVI.

HILKIAH THE PRIEST'S DISCOVERY,

IN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(2 Chron. xxxiv. 8–10, 14–21.)

Josiah did not grow tired of serving the Lord. When he had purified the land from idols, he thought next of repairing the house of the Lord.

It was now in a very broken state, through the wickedness of King Amon. There were many little houses round about the temple where priests lived, and holy things were stored up; but these chambers were now unfit for use, on account of their broken roofs and floors.

As it would require much money to make the repairs, Josiah sent Levites all over the land to collect money. This money he gave into the

charge of three good men. One of them was Shaphan the scribe. These three men took the money and brought it to the temple, to give to the high-priest. His name was Hilkiah.

The high-priest received the money and counted it; then he gave it back to the Levites for the payment of the workmen who would repair the temple.

At the same time that Hilkiah received the gold and silver from Shaphan, he told him that he had found the book of the law of the Lord. This was a far greater treasure than gold or silver. Hilkiah gave the book into the hands of Shaphan.

Where did Shaphan take it?

He took it to the king.

Shaphan began by telling the king that he had done the business he had sent him to do. 'The money,' said Shaphan, 'has been given to the workmen to repair the house of the Lord.'

Then Shaphan said, 'Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book.' What book? Then Shaphan told the king. The law written by Moses. It was the book written by Moses' own hand, and it contained Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The king had never seen this book before, nor even a copy of it. He was anxious to hear some of it.

Shaphan read some part.

It seems that Shaphan read a very terrible part. He read some of the Lord's curses on the wicked. In Deuteronomy, xxvii. and xxviii., there are many such curses. It is written, 'If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, all these curses shall come upon thee. Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field.'

When the king had heard Shaphan read some of the book—he rent his clothes, and he wept.

What grieved him so much?

He knew that his fathers had not obeyed this book, and he wanted to know whether the Lord was going to punish him and his people.

He had heard of the wickedness of his father Amon, and of his grandfather Manasseh, and he felt afraid lest their sins should bring down God's anger upon him and his people. Whom could he ask? Jeremiah was so young that few knew of him, or honoured him. What could Josiah do? To whom could he send for advice?

2 Kings, xxii. 10.

'And Shaphan read it before the king.'—P. 310.

CHAPTER CXVII.

HULDAH THE PROPHETESS,

IN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(2 CHRON. xxxiv. 20–28.)

JOSIAH was in great trouble after having read in the book of the Lord. He rent his clothes, he wept, and he prayed. He felt a strong desire to know whether the Lord would spare him and his people.

The right person to inquire of the Lord was the high-priest, for God had once given Aaron a breastplate with Urim and Thummim. Many people have longed to know what these were. The breastplate was made of fine linen, on which twelve precious stones were fastened. This linen was doubled, so it formed a bag behind the breastplate, and this bag contained the Urim and Thummim. It seems these were two wonderful stones, which were made by God, in some way to show His will.

But Hilkiah and Josiah knew nothing of this way of asking God, for they knew very little of the law.

The way Josiah thought of—was sending to a prophet.

To what prophet could he send ?

There were several now in Judah; one was young Jeremiah, and the others were Zephaniah and Habakkuk.

But Josiah did not send to them; perhaps they were all very young.

He sent to a woman named Huldah. She was a prophetess. Her husband was Shallum, the keeper of the priests' garments in the temple. Huldah lived in the college. This *may* have been a place where young men were taught.*

The king sent five men to Huldah's house. The first was Hilkiah the priest, another was Shaphan the priest, another was Ahikam, Shaphan's son, and two others. These five men brought the king's message to this holy woman. She gave them a very sad answer. It was too *late* for the nation to escape punishment. 'Too LATE, TOO LATE!'

Huldah answered. 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent ye to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, even all the curses which are written in the book that was read to the king. Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods . . . . therefore my wrath SHALL be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.'

* Some say the word translated 'college' means 'second,' and was the name of the street. They say it is the word translated 'second' in 2 Kings, xxiii. 4.

This was, indeed, a dreadful answer.

But the prophetess had something different to say to Josiah about himself.

Huldah now continued: 'As for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus saith the Lord: Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me, I have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and to thy grave in peace; neither shall THINE EYES SEE all the evil that I will bring upon this place and the inhabitants.'

The five messengers brought back this message to the king.

He must have been grieved to hear it was too late for the nation to be spared; but then he must have been comforted to hear that he should die in peace, and never see the evil that was to come.

We see what comes of praying to the Lord. Some good is sure to come. 'No believing prayer is ever lost,' once said a dying saint.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE PUBLIC READING,

IN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(2 CHRON. xxxiv. 29–32.)

Now that King Josiah had heard the law himself, he was very desirous that his people should hear it also.

So he appointed a day for his people to come to the temple. All who lived in Jerusalem were invited, and all who lived near in Judah and Benjamin. People who lived in distant parts could not come.

An immense number came. The priests and the Levites were there, the prophets were there—Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and the prophetess, must have been there, for she lived close by, and her husband had the care of the priestly robes.

Poor people also were there, and little children—for great and small were there.

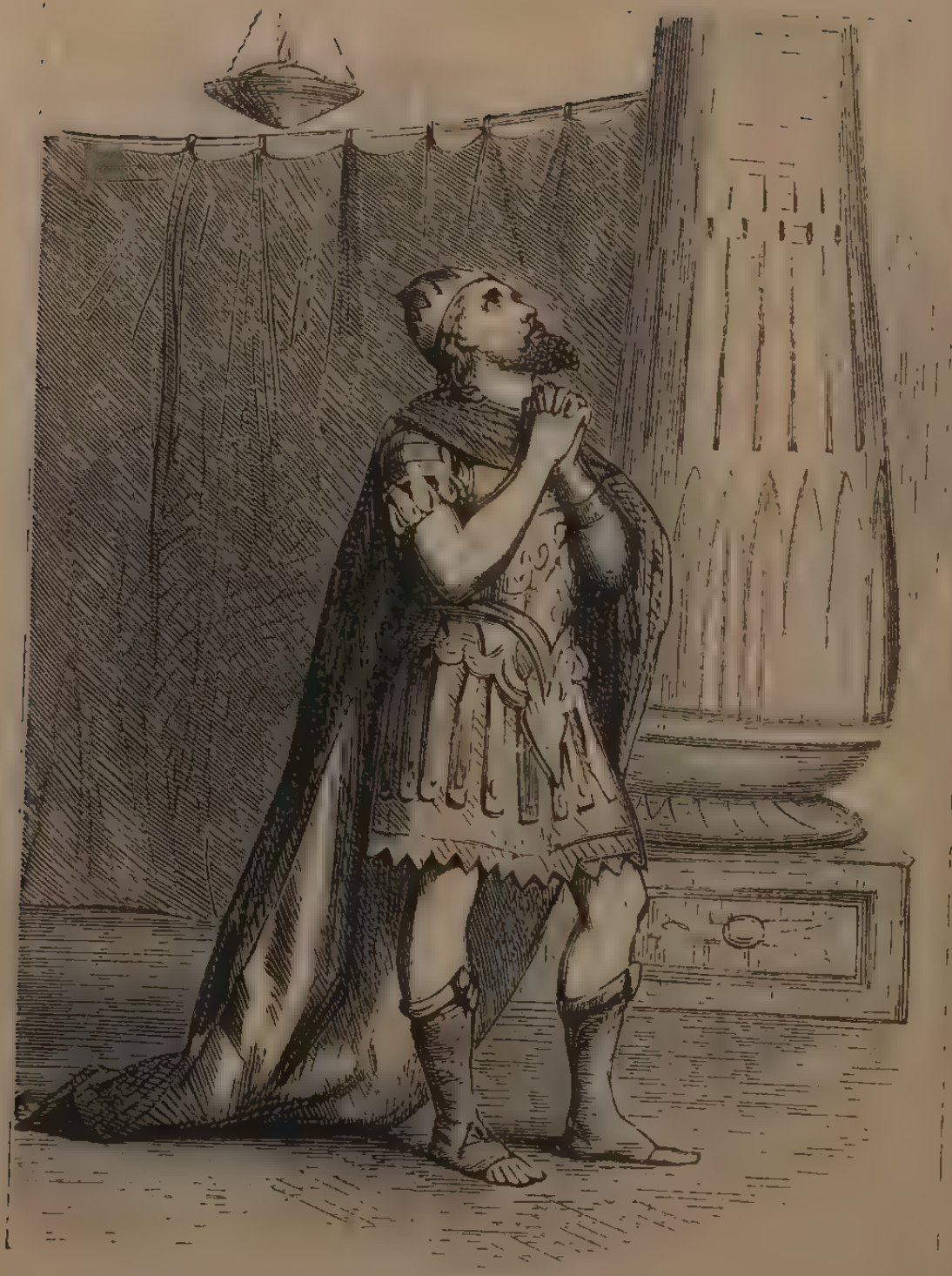
And who was it read the Bible to the people?

The king himself.

He stood in his place and read.

What was his place?

It was a high brass pulpit, in front of the great brass altar in the court for the men of Israel.



2 KINGS, XXIII. 3.
'Josiah stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord.'—P. 315.

This brass pulpit was like a high square table; Solomon had made it.*

Solomon, in all his glory, had once stood there and prayed.

The little King Joash had once stood there, with the crown upon his infant head.

Here King Josiah *now* stood reading the law of the Lord, written by the pen of Moses. He earnestly entreated the people to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments with all their hearts, and with all their souls. He told them of the Lord's covenant, which was, that if they would serve the Lord He would bless them. All the people present were ready to join in this covenant.

The king himself was sincere in making the covenant. But were all his people sincere? Oh, no! We are told by the prophets that most of them were hypocrites.†

* 'For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold.'—2 Chron. vi. 13.

† God says, 'Treacherous Judah hath not turned to me with her whole heart, but feignedly'

CHAPTER CXIX.

JERUSALEM'S IDOLATRY,

IN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(2 KINGS, xxiii. 4–14.)

Now that the king knew the law of the Lord he was anxious to obey it. He had once purified the temple from idols, but he had not done so completely. He had left many things in the temple that he now wanted to destroy. There were a quantity of golden vessels that had been used in the honour of idols. These vessels the king felt were polluted. So he desired Hilkiah and the other priests to bring them out of the temple.

See the white-robed band coming forth, bearing in their hands glittering cups of gold and silver. They are taking them down the valley where the brook Kedron flows. But they do not throw them into the stream; they kindle a great fire, and melt them in the flames, and then, when the fire is gone out, they gather up the ashes and put them by, to carry them to Bethel. You will soon hear of their visit to that place.

There was an idol still left in the house of God, called 'the grove.' Some say that this grove was

a beautiful tree; perhaps it represented that bad tree of which our first parents ate to their undoing.

This lovely tree had been worshipped, and it must be destroyed. It was taken to the brook, burned, stamped into powder, and then scattered over the graves of the priests who once worshipped it. For Josiah had already slain many of the idolatrous priests.

There were four white horses kept in a stable near the temple gate. They were called the horses of the sun, and were used to draw the chariot of the sun. Every morning it had been the custom for priests to drive this chariot and the four horses out of the east gate of the city to meet the sun as he rose.*

Josiah took away these horses, but he did not order them to be burned; as for the *chariots* the horses had drawn—*they* were burned in the fire.

There were altars that Ahaz had made, and others which Manasseh had made. These were beaten down by the king's order, crumbled into dust, and cast into the brook Kedron. Josiah never spared anything wicked because his father had made it.

The places which Solomon had built for his idols were still to be seen on the side of the

* The heathen had invented a foolish story about Apollo, or Phœbus, driving the sun from one end of the heavens to the other in a chariot.

Mount of Corruption; but the images were now cut down, and the broken pieces were covered with dead men's bones to make the place unclean: so it was called Corruption. Long afterwards this very mount was called 'Olives,' — sweet Mount Olives, where Jesus often prayed, and whence He ascended to heaven.

There was one horrible valley near Jerusalem, where little children had often been sacrificed to the fierce god Moloch. It was called Tophet, because 'Toph' means a drum, and drums were beaten to drown the children's cries while burning.

This hateful valley was defiled by Josiah with dead men's bones, that no one might worship there again.

By these righteous doings Josiah sought to put down Satan and all his works.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE DESTRUCTION AT BETHEL,

IN THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

(2 Kings, xxiii. 4–20. 2 Chron. xxxv. 1–20.)

Josiah had now a great work to do at Bethel. That was the city of the golden calf. It once be-

longed to the ten tribes of Israel, but as their king had been taken away, Josiah could do what he pleased in all the land.

Nearly four hundred years ago, Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, was sacrificing there, when a prophet from Judah came to him, and told him that a king should one day be born named Josiah, who should burn upon that altar the bones of the wicked priests. Josiah was the child of whom the prophet had spoken. He was now come to Bethel to fulfil that prophecy.

Bethel was twelve miles from Jerusalem. Josiah had broken down all the idols and altars in Jerusalem; he came to do the same at Bethel.

Jeroboam's high place was on a hill. There the great altar was placed, and near it was a grove. Josiah desired all these things should be destroyed; but while he was watching the workmen, he looked about and saw a great many tombs. He heard that these tombs contained the bones of priests who once sacrificed on the high place. Josiah knew that it was time for him to fulfil an old prophecy. He desired those bones to be taken up, and burned upon the altar before it was destroyed. Soon the whole place was set on fire, and altar and grove were seen in flames. All that was left after the burning—was stamped small to powder.

Amongst the graves of the wicked priests—Josiah saw a tombstone, on which there was writing; such writing is called an 'epitaph.'

Josiah asked what was written on the stone. Perhaps the writing was not clear and easy to read. The men of the city knew all about this tomb, and answered Josiah,—'It is the sepulchre of the man of God who came out of Judah, and who said that you would do all that you have done to the altar at Bethel.'

Who remembers the sad end of the prophet of Judah? Was he not tempted by a wicked old prophet to disobey God, and to go home with him, and was he not eaten by a lion?

The men of Bethel knew the whole history well.

Josiah said, 'Let him alone, and let no man move his bones.'

Well might Josiah honour the man who had called him by his name so long before he was born.

With the good prophet's bones were mingled the bones of the wicked old prophet. These wicked bones were left alone, because they were mixed up with the others.

But shall they not be divided in the day when Christ shall call the dead from their graves? He will separate the wicked from the righteous for ever and ever.

Before Josiah returned home he visited the cities of Samaria—destroying the high places, slaying the priests, and burning their bones on their altars.

When he was returned to Jerusalem he kept the grandest passover that had been kept since

the days of Samuel. It was far grander than Hezekiah's passover.

Josiah gave an enormous number of animals for the sacrifices.* There were many peace-offerings presented. The flesh of the animals in peace-offerings was eaten chiefly by the offerers and the priests; only the fat was burned. Josiah gave also lambs for the passover. In that passover-week thousands of people feasted in a godly manner before the Lord.

Josiah wished his people to be happy in the service of God. What he could not bear — were the wicked amusements that went on among the worshippers of idols.

Christians in these days desire poor people to be happy, and they often give them feasts in their gardens, where hymns are sung and God's name is praised.

People in this land do not worship Baal and golden calves; but when they make ungodly feasts, and see sinful sights, and join in worldly dances, and sing foolish songs,—they really worship Satan.

* He gave double the number of animals to the people that Hezekiah gave. The numbers are thus stated by Kitto :—

	Hezekiah.	Josiah.
Oxen . .	2,000	3,800
Lambs and Kids	17,000	37,600
	19,000	41,400

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE DEATH OF JOSIAH.

(2 Chron. xxxv. 20 to end. 2 Kings, xxiii. 25–27.)

Josiah lived thirteen years after this passover.

He had time to keep thirteen more passovers with his people.

He was now nearly forty years old. This is the age when a man is strongest. But God had promised Josiah that he should not see the evils that were coming upon Jerusalem. If Josiah had lived to be old he would have seen these troubles; so God took him away in the full flower of his life. It was not by disease he died. It was in battle, as you shall hear.

There was a great king in Egypt, called Pharaoh-Necho. He set out with a great army to fight against the King of Babylon.

You know that the land of Israel lies just between Egypt and Babylon. If you look in the map, you will see this.

Josiah heard that Pharaoh was passing through his land, so he got an army ready, and went out to meet him, in order to hinder him from going further.

As he was leading his army on their way some messengers met him.

They came from Pharaoh with this message to Josiah:—

'What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against THEE this day, but against another nation, for God commanded me to make haste. So do not meddle with me, lest God destroy thee.'

This was the message.

Was it true that God had commanded Pharaoh to go against Babylon? We think it was true.

Josiah ought to have asked the high-priest to inquire for him of the Lord: and if the high-priest could not inquire, he ought to have asked Jeremiah, or Zephaniah, or Habakkuk, what was the will of the Lord.

But Josiah had already set out, and he would not turn back.

He went towards the north of the land till he came to the valley of Megiddo, near to Mount Carmel and the river Kishon. There Josiah found the great army of Egypt.

He was afraid lest Pharaoh's words should come true, and he should be destroyed. So he put on the clothes of a common soldier, and did not let his face be seen. Thus he disguised himself, that the Egyptians might not shoot at him with their arrows more than at any other man.

But though they did not know which man was

Josiah,—some of their arrows struck Josiah's body.

Then the king called to his soldiers, 'Take me away, for I am sore wounded.' The chariot where he lay must have been filled with blood. His servants lifted him out of it, and placed him in another royal chariot, and they set out with him to bring him to Jerusalem.

But on the way Josiah died.

The chariot entered Jerusalem, bearing the king's dead body.

There were no dogs ready to lick his blood, as dogs once licked Ahab's body in the pool of Samaria.

His beloved body was buried in one of the sepulchres of the kings his fathers.

The whole city and the whole country were filled with grief on account of Josiah's death. He had been so good and so kind, so charitable to the poor, so just and so true in all his ways, that many mourned his death with loud weeping and bitter tears.

There was one who felt his loss very much. It was the prophet Jeremiah. He knew that it was a terrible thing for the nation to lose so excellent a king in the prime of his life.

One thing he said of Josiah was this,—'He judged the cause of the poor and needy, and it was well with him. Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.'*

* Jer. xxii. 16.

Also the singing-men and the singing-women sang sorrowful songs about Josiah. It was made a rule in Israel to sing about him every year, on the day he died. This day was called the anniversary of his death.

The Lord said of him that there was no king like Josiah, who turned to Him with all his heart and soul and might, and who observed so well the law of Moses; neither did any king after him serve the Lord as he did.

Hezekiah trusted in the Lord in time of danger more than Josiah, but he did not observe the law as well.

Well might the people lament him, for he was the LAST good king that ever reigned over the land. Four more kings did reign, but they all were wicked. The Lord was determined to remove Judah out of His sight and to cast off Jerusalem. The sins of Manasseh had been so great that God would not pardon the land.

CHAPTER CXXII.

THE REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ.

(2 KINGS, xxiii. 31–33. JER. xxii. 10–12. EZEK. xix. 2–4.

WHEN Josiah died he left three sons. Two of them were grown up.

The people took the second son and made him king.

Why did they make the second king, and not the eldest? It may have been that he was braver than his elder brother, or that he was more good-natured. It is plain that the people liked him better than his brother. His name was Jehoahaz.

He was very fierce. He resembled a young lion in his love of war and blood. He would not be quiet, but would rage against the nations around.

These heathen nations grew very angry, and Pharaoh-Necho grew very angry, and all joined together against him. They had made a plan to get hold of him, and they caught him at last when he was in the land of Syria. Then Pharaoh-Necho put chains upon him and carried him away with him into Egypt, and there kept him in prison.

He had only reigned three months, but during that short time he had done evil in the sight of the Lord. He had not walked in the ways of Josiah his father, but in the way of his grandfather Amon and his great-grandfather Manasseh. The Lord punished him for his wickedness soon, but He gave him time to repent afterwards.

The people were anxious to have him back to Jerusalem, for, you know, they liked him better than his elder brother.

Jeremiah the prophet spoke to the people about him and his father Josiah. When he saw the people still weeping for Josiah, their beloved king: he said, 'Weep not for the *dead*.'

Whom did he mean by the dead? Josiah, their dead king.

No one had reason to weep for him, for he was happy with God. Jeremiah went on to say,—

'Weep sore for him that is just gone away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.'

Whom did Jeremiah speak of? Jehoahaz, who was gone as a captive into Egypt.

Jehoahaz was sometimes called by the name of Shallum.

Jeremiah continued:—

'Thus saith the Lord concerning Shallum, 'He shall not return any more, but he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this place no more.'

This was the Lord's sentence upon Jehoahaz

Jehoahaz returned no more. We know not how long he lived in Egypt, nor whether he repented, as Manasseh had done in Assyria.

A long while afterwards a prophet called Ezekiel spoke of Jehoahaz in a parable.

He said the people of Israel were like a lioness who brought up her whelps among lions. She took one of her whelps and taught him to catch the prey and to devour men.

'The nations heard of him.'

'He was taken in their pit.'

'He was brought with chains into the land of Egypt.'

The meaning of the parable is plain.

This young king was fierce like a lion, but God hates cruelty and war and bloodshed, and He caused him to be taken and shut up for the rest of his life in Egypt.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(2 KINGS, xxiii. 33–37. JER. xxii. 13, 14.)

WHEN young Jehoahaz was taken prisoner into Egypt, was there another king? Yes; Pharaoh-Necho set another king upon the throne of Jerusalem.

This king was the brother of Jehoahaz, and his name was Jehoiakim.

His name was Eliakim at first, but Pharaoh gave him the new name of Jehoiakim.

By giving him a new name Pharaoh showed his power over him.

This was the first time that a king of Judah was not the son of the king before. All the kings of Judah reigned in one long line of fathers and sons.

It was not so with the kings of Israel. There never was any kingdom except Judah in which fathers and sons reigned one after another for nearly four hundred years.

But now God was going to overthrow Judah.

Jehoiakim was older than his brother, but the people had not liked him so well, and so had not made him king. Soon they disliked him more. Pharaoh required him to pay an immense sum of money, and Jehoiakim paid it—a hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold.

But how did he get the money? By taxing his people; he made each person pay a good sum, and he would not excuse any one. By doing this he distressed his poor people much.

Jehoiakim was a cruel and covetous man. He built himself a large house, with beautiful windows and painted rooms; but he would not pay his workmen. He feasted in his palace and thought only of getting money from poor people. Therefore every one hated him.

God was not pleased with him, for he did all the evil things his grandfather and great-grandfather had done, while he did nothing that his good father had taught him.

Yet the Lord did not cause him to be taken away, as his brother had been. Jehoiakim went on reigning for eleven years.

He was twenty-five when he began to reign.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

JEREMIAH'S JOURNEY TO THE EUPHRATES,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. xiii. 1–11, 18, 19.)

WHILE Jehoiakim was reigning wickedly, Jeremiah was preaching faithfully. It was very merciful of God to give the people such a holy and loving prophet.

The Lord often told him to do strange things. He did so that the people might attend to his words. When they saw Jeremiah in some unusual dress, then they looked and listened.

It was the custom for men to wear a girdle. We know not what sort of girdle Jeremiah usually wore round his body: perhaps it was a leathern girdle, such as Elijah wore.

Jeremiah was a priest, and he wore a linen girdle when he served in the temple ; but he did not wear such an one always.

Now God said to him, 'Go get thee a linen girdle, and put it round thy body, but do not put it in water,' that is, 'Do not wash it.'

So Jeremiah went and got such a girdle. He wore it close to his flesh. As it was white, it soon looked dirty ; but Jeremiah did not wash it, as God had told him not.

After a while the Lord spoke again to Jeremiah, saying,—

'Go, with the girdle round thy body, to the river Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock.'

It was a journey of two hundred miles to the river Euphrates. That was the river on which Babylon was built. Was Jeremiah willing to go there to hide his girdle ?

Yes, he obeyed all God told him. It seemed to be of no use to take the girdle so far, just to bury it ; but Jeremiah did not ask God what was His reason—he humbly obeyed. We do not know whether he went alone—very likely some of the Jews went with him to see what he did.

Jeremiah went and hid the girdle in a hole by the river, and then he came back.

A long while passed,—perhaps a year,—when God told Jeremiah to go again to Euphrates to take his girdle out of the hole.

So he went again, and digged into the hole and found the girdle, and pulled it out.

And in what state was the girdle? It was dirty when it was put in, but now it was much worse—it was quite spoiled. Any linen thing which has been long buried is rotten and good for nothing.

Soon the Lord told Jeremiah why he had desired him to spoil his girdle.

That girdle was like the Lord's people.

As the girdle was worn close to Jeremiah's body, so the people had been brought close to God, and they had been taught by Him, and loved and cared for by Him.

But how had they behaved to God? Like this girdle,—they had not been washed from their sins.

And how was God going to treat them? He was going to send them to Babylon to be slaves.

This was the meaning of the parable of the girdle.

The Lord said, 'Thus shall I punish the great pride of Jerusalem.'

He sent also a message to the king and to the queen, Jehoiakim and Nehushta,—

'Humble yourselves; sit down; take off your ornaments on your heads, even your crowns of glory; for Judah shall be carried away captive; all of it shall be wholly carried away captive.'

But this message did not stop the king and the queen from going on in their sins.

CHAPTER CXXV.

SABBATH-BREAKING,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. xvii. 19 to end.)

ABOUT this time the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'Go, and stand in the gate of the city, by which the kings go in and out; and go to all the other gates; and call out these words.'

Then the Lord told Jeremiah what words he was to say.

The message was to forbid the people carrying burdens out of the city on the Sabbath-day; and also to forbid them bringing burdens into the city on the Sabbath-day.

The people were in the habit of carrying burdens in and out on the Sabbath-day.

What burdens? What did they contain?

Things to sell, such as fruit.

The people went on selling and buying on the Sabbath-day, though God had said in his fourth commandment, 'Thou shalt do no manner of work on the Sabbath-day.'

The Jewish Sabbath began at six on Friday

evening, and continued all Saturday till six o'clock.

On the Friday evening the people brought in from the country all kinds of things to eat. They loaded their asses with sheaves of corn, and bottles of wine, and clusters of grapes and figs, and baskets of fish, and sold them in the city on the Sabbath.*

If there had been a good king, he would not have allowed his people to do this; but Jehoiakim set the example of every wickedness.

Jeremiah proclaimed at the gates, 'Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath-day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem, nor carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath-day.'

Then Jeremiah said, by the word of the Lord, 'If you will obey,—this city shall remain for ever.'

Then he threatened, if they disobeyed—'The Lord saith, I will kindle a fire, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.'

You will soon hear how this threatening was fulfilled, and how the city was burned.

A long while afterwards, when Jesus came, the Pharisees found fault with a poor man for carrying his bed, and said he was carrying a burden. But it was not such a burden that God forbade

* These habits of the people are described in Neh. xiii. 15–22.

people to carry on the Sabbath—it was not a burden of things to sell.

One thing that may be sold on the Sabbath is milk, because cows must be milked every day, and milk cannot be kept. Another thing is medicine for people taken suddenly ill.

But the Lord has given us six days for earning bread to feed our bodies, and He has given us one day for feeding our souls with His word. On all days we should feed our souls, as well as our bodies, but on the Sabbath we are not to spend time on earthly things more than we can help.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

JEREMIAH'S BOTTLE BROKEN,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. XIX.)

ONE day the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'Go and get an earthen bottle.'

This bottle was not, like our bottles, made of glass; it was more like a very common jug, with a narrow neck.

Where was Jeremiah to take it?

To a place near Jerusalem. It was a low place, and so called a valley. It was a place where wicked Jews had offered up their children

as burnt-offerings to Baal. It was called Tophet, because 'toph' means drum, and drums used to be beaten to drown the screams of the children by a louder noise. To this horrible place the prophet was to go.

Some time ago Josiah had burned the bones of wicked priests in this valley, that he might make it seem unclean to the Jews. So now the valley was black with ashes.

To this dreadful place Jeremiah went. He did not go alone. God commanded him to take the chief men of the city with him—the wise men who belonged to the Sanhedrim, and the holy men who were set over the other priests. These men were not really wise or holy, but they were thought to be so. Jeremiah had to go a very little way. When he was in the midst of the dismal vale he stopped and said to them, 'Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, because the people have built here high places for Baal, to burn their children with fire, as burnt-offerings to Baal. Therefore this place shall no more be called Tophet, but the Valley of Slaughter.'

Then he broke the bottle in the sight of the men who went with him; and he said, 'Thus saith the Lord: *So* will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again.'

Then Jeremiah left Tophet, and came to the Lord's house; and he stood in the court, and

said to all the people, 'Thus saith the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns—all the evil that I have declared, because they have hardened their necks that they might not hear my words.'

Jeremiah knew well that such words made the people very angry, but he chose to say whatever the Lord told him.

No one could feel more grieved for the people than Jeremiah did. He once said, 'If you will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.' But he would be faithful to his God.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

PASHUR THE PRIEST,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. XX.)

AMONGST the enemies of Jeremiah was a priest called Pashur: he was the greatest of all the priests, next to the high-priest. He had the power to punish Jeremiah. He heard that the prophet had been foretelling evil; so he went up to him in the court of the temple and struck him a blow.

After offering this cruel insult, Pashur commanded his servants to put the prophet into a prison near the temple. There his feet were put

in the stocks. In that dismal place he passed the whole night.

Could he sleep?

No; that would be impossible. But he could pray.

In the morning Pashur desired the servants to bring Jeremiah out of his prison.

Was the prophet now frightened? Did he speak no more terrible words?

No: he was not frightened—he was still ready to declare the words of God. He had a message from God to Pashur, and it was a very terrible one.

That word 'Pashur' signifies 'Safety.'

Jeremiah said, 'The Lord hath not called thy name "Pashur," or "Safety;" but the Lord hath called thy name "Magor-missabib," which is, "A terror round about."'

Why was he to have that name?

Because such dreadful things would happen to him that all his friends would be terrified.

Pashur had *now* many friends; but one day they would be punished, as well as himself.

Jeremiah cried out, 'Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself and to all thy friends. I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. And THOU, Pashur, and all that dwell in thy house, shall go into captivity; and thou shalt come to Babylon, and *there* shalt thou

die; and thou shalt be buried there, *thou* and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies.'

It was brave of Jeremiah to deliver this message.

We do not know what Pashur answered, but we find that he did not keep the prophet in prison.

The people all round began to mock Jeremiah; especially they laughed at that name, 'Magor-missabib.' *

Jeremiah heard them whispering, and laughing, and saying, 'We will take our revenge upon him.' But Jeremiah knew where to go for comfort, and he said, 'The Lord is with me, as a mighty terrible one: He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers.'

These were words of faith.

Afterwards Jeremiah's faith failed, and he grew so miserable that he said, 'Cursed be the *day* wherein I was born; cursed be the *man* who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man-child is born unto thee, making him very glad!' It was wrong of Jeremiah to speak thus; it is just what Job said in his sorrow.

But the Lord pitied both Job and Jeremiah in their troubles, for the Lord is gracious and of tender mercy to those who fear Him. It is only Jesus who never spoke an impatient word in all His agonies.

* 'I heard the defaming of many,—Magor-missabib; or, fear on every side.'—Jer. xx. 10.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

THE UPROAR IN THE TEMPLE,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. xxvi.)

THE Lord commanded Jeremiah to go to the court of the temple, and to declare a message. A great many people from all parts of Judah were come up to worship. The priests were there, offering sacrifices, and false prophets were there, teaching lies.

It must have made Jeremiah tremble to speak to such an assembly of prophets, priests, and people.

However, he called out, 'Thus saith the Lord: If you will not hear me, and walk in my law, I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse.'

Every one remembered hearing of Shiloh, where Eli once was high-priest, and every one knew that it had long ago been forsaken.

Jeremiah went on speaking for a long while.

When he left off speaking he saw all his hearers coming towards him with angry looks — prophets, priests, and people. They all seized

him, saying, 'Thou shalt surely die! Why didst thou say this house shall be like Shiloh, and this city—a curse?'

The priests and the prophets hated Jeremiah the most, and they turned the people against him.

Poor Jeremiah was now being treated as Jesus was on the night of His mocking by the priests and their servants. There was a great uproar in the court, for there was no one there able to judge Jeremiah. All the princes and judges were gone to see the king in his palace.

Soon the princes heard that there was an uproar in the temple courts, and they left the king and came down to the temple. The king ought to have come with them, but Jehoiakim was one of Jeremiah's greatest enemies.

The princes sat on their judgment-seats in the court. The priests and the prophets began by accusing Jeremiah to the princes. They said, 'This man is worthy to die, for he hath spoken against this city.'

Then Jeremiah stood up to defend himself. He spoke bravely, but meekly, saying, 'The Lord *sent* me to prophesy against this house and this city. As for *me*, behold, I am in your hand. Do with me as you please; but know, that if you put me to death you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves.'

The princes took part with Jeremiah, and so did the people, for they were soon turned from one side to the other.

The princes and the people said to the priests and the prophets, 'This man is not worthy of death, for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.'

Then some of the elders stood up to speak for Jeremiah. One elder spoke of Micah, a prophet who lived in the days of Hezekiah. (His prophecies are in the Bible, and we can read them.) This elder said: 'When Micah said Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, did Hezekiah put him to death? No; but he prayed, and the Lord did not destroy Jerusalem. But when a prophet named Urijah spoke against this city, Jehoiakim slew him with the sword, and threw his body among the graves of the vilest people—thieves and murderers.'

The people knew that Hezekiah was good and that Jehoiakim was wicked; yet sometimes they were ready to act like Jehoiakim, and to put Jeremiah to death.

But the prophet had a friend, a great and rich man, who kept him from being killed: his name was A-hi-kam; he was the son of that good Shaphan the scribe, who once read the book of the law to King Josiah. The son was like the father, and took Jeremiah's part against the wicked people.

In this way the Lord answered Jeremiah's prayers in his trouble.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

THE OBEDIENT SONS,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. XXXV.)

THE Lord tried many ways to make the people repent of their sins.

Once He said to Jeremiah, 'Go to the Rechabites.'

Who were these Rechabites?

They were descended from a good man called Jethro. Did you ever hear of him?

He was the father-in-law of Moses.

Jethro could not go with Moses to the land of Israel, but his son Hobab did. Moses said to Hobab, 'Come with us, and we will do thee good.' And so Hobab went through the wilderness with Moses, and Hobab's children dwelt in the land.*

One of Hobab's children was called Rechab, and Rechab's children were called Rechabites.

These were the Rechabites that God spoke of to Jeremiah.

* They were called Kenites.—Judges, i. 16.

The Lord said, 'Take them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink.'

There were a great many little chambers built very near the temple.

Jeremiah brought the Rechabites into a chamber upstairs.

He set jugs and cups of wine before them, and said, 'Drink ye wine.'

They answered, 'We will not drink; for the son of Rechab our father commanded us to drink no wine; neither us, nor our sons, for ever. He told us to dwell in tents, and to have no fields, nor gardens.'

Was Jeremiah pleased with these men for not drinking wine?

He was very much pleased to see them so obedient to their father. God had not commanded them to drink wine, though he had told Jeremiah to set wine before them, just to see whether they would obey their father.

That son of Rechab who had told them not to drink wine was called Jonadab. He once rode with King Jehu in his chariot, but he had died long ago.

Did the Rechabites dwell in tents? Yes, they did; but they had been frightened by a great army coming from Babylon, and so they had come into the city for safety.

Soon the Lord sent Jeremiah to tell the people of Jerusalem how obedient the Rechabites were.

He said: 'They obey their father's commandment; but you do not obey me. I have said, "Return from your evil ways, and do not serve other gods;" but you have not listened. Therefore I will bring upon Judah all the evil that I have said, because I called and they have not answered.'

Jeremiah had a message also to the Rechabites,—

'Because you have obeyed the commandment of your father Jonadab, the son of Rechab, there shall always be a man of your family to stand before me.'

We see how much the Lord is pleased when children obey their parents.

Why did Jonadab forbid his children to drink wine?

Because he did not want them to have vineyards in the land of Israel, lest the Israelites should be envious and turn them out of the land.

We know there are Rechabites living now. Missionaries have found them in the lands near Canaan, dwelling in tents, and drinking no wine. They know the law of Moses, and keep his words. We are sure they will one day believe in Christ, because of that prophecy, 'Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before ME for ever.'

CHAPTER CXXX.

THE ROLL WRITTEN IN PRISON,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. xxv. 11, 12; xxvi. 1–9; xlv.)

JEREMIAH faithfully delivered all God's messages to the people.

He had long told them God would punish them, burn their city: but he had not told them fully *what* God would do. Now he declared the very *name* of the king who was coming against them.

It was a king who had just begun to reign in Babylon. His name was Nebuchadnezzar. He was a great conqueror, and was coming soon to Jerusalem.

Jeremiah said: 'Thus saith the Lord, You shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.'

Where would they serve him?

In Babylon.

This was a sorrowful prospect for the Jews. How many of them would die in Babylon during those long seventy years?

But the time was not quite come yet.

Jehoiakim was so angry with Jeremiah for all his prophecies that he desired he should be shut up. Jeremiah had been in prison once before for

a whole night; but now he was many days and nights in prison.

While he was there the Lord gave him this command:—

'Take a roll of a book, and write down all that I have spoken against Israel and Judah unto this day.'

The Lord had been speaking against them to Jeremiah for twenty-three years. Jeremiah was quite young when first he was made a prophet. If he was twenty then, he was now forty-three.

Jeremiah could not write his prophecies without some one to help him. So he called for his young friend Baruch, and told him to write. Baruch got a long piece of skin, and wrote on it all that Jeremiah told him, and then he rolled up the long strip, and that roll was called a book.

Baruch did not mind writing for Jeremiah: but now he was told to do something he did not like.

Jeremiah said, 'I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the Lord: therefore, go thou and read in the ears of the people what thou hast written from my mouth. Go on the fasting day. It may be that they will pray to the Lord, and return from their evil ways: for great is the anger and fury that the Lord hath pronounced against this people.'

Baruch felt such grief in having to read the dreadful message out of his book, that he cried out to God before he went:—

'Woe is me now! the Lord hath added another grief to my sorrow. I faint, and I have no rest.'

Then Jeremiah in prison comforted Baruch. He said:—'The Lord saith, Do not seek to have great things (such as riches and honour), for I am going to bring troubles upon all men: but I will give thee thy life wherever thou art taken.'

From this time Baruch knew he should not be killed by the Jews, however angry they might be with him; nor by the enemies, when they should conquer the city, but that they would let him live.

Baruch went and read the book in the temple to the people, as the Lord had commanded.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE FIRST CAPTIVES OF JUDAH,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(2 Kings, xxiv. part of verse 1. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, 7. Dan. i. 1–8.)

About this time the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem. He was the young King Nebuchadnezzar, who had just inherited the kingdom from his father, Nabor-palassar.

This Nebuchadnezzar was going about from country to country, conquering everywhere.

He came round Jerusalem with his armies, and he got in at last, and his people seized hold of Jehoiakim, and put him in chains, intending to carry him to Babylon.

But Jehoiakim promised to pay a great deal of money to Nebuchadnezzar; and so he was not taken to Babylon, but left upon his throne.

Nebuchadnezzar saw what a splendid place the temple was, and what fine golden cups, and jars, and basins, were stored within its chambers. So he chose a great many of them to be taken to Babylon, to adorn the temple of his chief god. It was a great grief to the people to lose such fine ornaments. This was the Lord's punishment for all their idolatry.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted more than *cups:* he wanted *men* to adorn his palace. He spoke to the man who had charge of his servants—Ash-pe-naz—and said:—

'Look out for some young men, or boys. They must be relations of the royal family, or of the great lords. They must be beautiful; they must have no defects (such as lameness, weak eyes, or crookedness); they must be very clever, and well able to learn; and they must have strength to stand before the king in his palace.'

So Ash-pe-naz looked out for such young men in Judah, and he found a good many. But there were four much above the rest.

Their names were—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

These young men were taken with many others to Babylon. You will hear a great deal about them; for they possessed what was better than beauty or cleverness—the fear of the Lord.

When they came to Babylon they were very well treated. They were placed for three years under the care of Ash-pe-naz. They were fed from the king's table, on the most delicious and nourishing food, and the richest, sweetest wines, and they were instructed in all manner of learning. Ash-pe-naz showed them the greatest kindness and indulgence.

One of them was his favourite—that was Daniel; for God had put in the heart of Ashpenaz tender love for this delightful youth.

Do you think the four noble youths liked being in Babylon?

No; they must have felt grieved at being slaves in a heathen land, far from the temple and their beloved homes. But they submitted to the will of God, and did all they could to honour their God in the land of idols.

These young men, with some more Jews, were the first captives taken to Babylon.

Now began the captivity—six hundred and six years before Christ.

In seventy years the captives will begin to return, but not Daniel and his friends: they will never come back.

Do you know that Isaiah the prophet had foretold this captivity?

Do you remember that King Hezekiah fell sick and recovered?

Do you remember that messengers came from Babylon to wish him joy?

Do you remember how Hezekiah showed them all his treasures in his pride and vanity? and how Isaiah came and told him that all his treasures should be taken one day to Babylon; and that some of his children should be servants in the king's palace?

Daniel and his friends were relations of Hezekiah, and some were his great-grandchildren. All came true, though Isaiah had spoken the message more than a hundred years before.

Hezekiah had answered humbly:—'Good is the word of the Lord,' and the Lord had said these sad things should not happen in *his* days. 2 Kings, xx. 12–20.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE ROLL READ IN THE PALACE OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. XXXVI. 9–26.)

JEHOIAKIM was not brought to repentance by his great troubles.

He had been very near going to Babylon, but he had been released from his chains. This was a merciful deliverance. He now had another opportunity to leave off his sins, and turn to God. But he was hardened and impenitent.

The people appointed a fast-day, to keep in mind the king of Babylon breaking into Jerusalem, and taking away many captives. The fast-day was just a year from the breaking in.

On that day every one went without nice food, and many people ate nothing.

Baruch went on this day to read again the roll he had written from Jeremiah's mouth.

Jeremiah was not now in prison, but he was so much hated by the king that it was not safe for him to appear. So Baruch went instead.

He entered a chamber in the courts of the temple. It is supposed that the chamber was over a gate, and that he spoke out of the window to the people beneath. The chamber belonged to one of the sons of Shaphan—not to Ahikam, but to another son, called Gemariah.

Gemariah himself was not there, but his young son, Michaiah, heard all the words. This youth was so much struck with the dreadful prophecies of the book, that he wished his father to hear them, and the other princes. He knew where to find them. They were in a room of the king's palace, called the scribe's chamber.

So he went there, and found them all sitting together, and his father Gemariah amongst them.

Michaiah had not brought the roll with him, but he repeated all he could remember.

When the princes had heard Michaiah speak, they wished very much to hear Baruch read the roll. They sent a man named Jehudi to fetch Baruch.

Jehudi soon found him, and said: 'Take in thine hand the roll thou hast been reading to the people, and come.'

Must it not have pleased Baruch to hear that the princes wanted to know what God had spoken?

So he took the roll in his hand, and came into the chamber in the palace.

The princes were all waiting there, anxious to hear him. They said, 'Sit down now, and read the roll aloud.'

So Baruch read it in their ears.

When the princes had heard the awful words they were much afraid; but they were not angry.

They said to Baruch, 'We shall certainly tell the king all these words. Tell us now, how did you know what to write?'

Baruch replied, 'Jeremiah told me all these words, and I wrote them down with ink in this book.'

Then the princes said to him, 'Go you and Jeremiah, and hide yourselves in some place which no man knows of.'

The princes kindly wished to save the lives of these prophets, for they knew how fierce and violent Jehoiakim was.

Then they went to the king.

They found him in his winter room, for this was the ninth month, when the weather was cold. The sun shone upon the winter room, and a large pan of charcoal was placed in it.*

The princes laid up the precious roll in the chamber where they had been sitting, and they went to the king with nothing in their hands. They found the king sitting close to his burning pan.

They then repeated to him all they could remember.

But this did not satisfy the king. He said to Jehudi, 'Go and fetch the roll.'

Then Jehudi was obliged to bring it out of the scribes' chamber.

He read it aloud to the king as he sat by the fire, while the princes stood around.

The king grew very angry as he listened.

When Jehudi had read three or four columns of the writing, Jehoiakim took the roll out of his hands, and he took out his own penknife.

Then the princes were afraid that the king was going to destroy the roll. Three of the princes entreated the king earnestly not to hurt it. Gemariah was one of these three.

But the king would not hear a word: he cut

* In the Eastern countries there are no grates like ours, but pans of charcoal are used. The words of the Scripture really mean that such a fire was set before Jehoiakim.

up the roll into pieces, and then threw them all into the brazen pan.

There the roll was all burned up.

Then Jehoiakim told three of the princes to go and seize Jeremiah and Baruch. He did not send the three princes who had begged him to spare the roll; but three others.

The princes could not find the two prophets.

How could they, when the Lord Himself had hid them? He can find a hiding-place where no one can come.

How very wickedly Jehoiakim had behaved! He was one of the most daring kings that had ever sat upon the throne.

But had the princes behaved well?

No; they had not done as wickedly as the king; but they had not shown the grief they ought: they had not rent their garments, nor sat in ashes, when they heard the words of God. The king of Nineveh had done all this when Jonah foretold his destruction. He, and his princes and his people, had clothed themselves in sackcloth, and said, 'Who can tell if God will turn and repent?'

But none of the princes of Judah felt much alarmed or very unhappy.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

THE SECOND ROLL WRITTEN,

IN THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM.

(JER. xxxvi. 27 to end.)

No one ever got any good by a wicked deed, nor did Jehoiakim—by burning the roll.

There was one sentence in that roll that he disliked very much. It was this:

'The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease man and beast.'

He had burned that sentence, but God would never forget it.

No one could find Jeremiah and Baruch, because the Lord had hid them. No one could go and tell them about the burning of the roll.

But God told Jeremiah: He said, 'Take another roll, and write in all the words that were written in the first roll, for Jehoiakim has burned that roll.'

What must Jeremiah have felt at hearing of this daring deed?

He was quite willing to write another, and he

called Baruch to write it for him, while he told him what to say.

This roll was to be just like the other, only it was to have these terrible words added: 'Thou hast burned the roll, therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost; and I will punish him and his children and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them all the evil that I have pronounced.'

See what Jehoiakim got for burning the roll.

This was the first time he was told he should not be buried, and that his son should not reign after him.

We do not know who told Jehoiakim about the new roll. It was not safe for Jeremiah or Baruch to go near him. He would have been killed long ago by Jehoiakim if it had not been for the prince Ahikam; this great lord had protected Jeremiah for many years.

Do you remember that Jehoiakim had once put a good prophet to death named Urijah? That prophet had fled to Egypt for safety, but the king had sent men after him to slay him with the sword. Besides killing the prophet, Jehoiakim had ordered his dead body to be cast among the graves of thieves and murderers. Jehoiakim would have done the same to Jeremiah and to Baruch if he could have found them.

God had not forgotten the blood of Urijah, and had determined that the king's body should be treated in the same kind of way.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

THE DEATH OF JEHOIAKIM.

(2 KINGS, xxiv. part of v. 1–5. JER. xxii. 13–19. EZEK. xix. 5–9.)

JEHOIAKIM had once been conquered by the king of Babylon. But he had not been taken to Babylon, because he had promised to pay a large sum of money every year. He paid the money for three years, and then he rebelled and said he would pay no more. This was breaking his promise. His punishment soon came.

The Lord was very angry with Jehoiakim for all his crimes. He had long been leading the life of a lion.

Do you remember that a prophet named Ezekiel said that Jehoiakim's brother Jehoahaz was like a lion. Jehoahaz had been caught and taken to Egypt. Jehoiakim also was to be caught and taken to Babylon.

This is what Ezekiel said of him: 'He went up and down among the lions; he became a young

lion; he learned to catch the prey, and devoured men. Then the nations set against him on every side, and spread their net over him, and he was taken in their pit. They put him in ward in chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon.' Ezek. xix. 6–8.

The nations who set against him were bands of Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites. God sent them against the kingdom of Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he had spoken by the prophets.

The king of Babylon would not pardon him for breaking his promise, and determined to take him to Babylon, but on the way Jehoiakim died, and his body was cast out in the day to the heat and in the night to the frost. This was having the burial of an ass, as Jeremiah had said (Jer. xxii. 18, 19). There was no one to lament over him, and to say, 'Ah, lord!' People did not love him as they had loved his father Josiah, that good king. Jehoiakim had been a selfish, cruel king, so no one loved or lamented him.

He was twenty-five when he began to reign, he reigned eleven years, and was thirty-six when he died.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

REIGN OF JEHOIACHIN, OR CONIAH.

(2 KINGS, xxiv. 6-17. JER. xxii. 24–28.)

GOD had declared that none of Jehoiakim's children should reign after him. Baruch had added these words to the roll: 'He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David.' (Jer. xxxvi. 30.)

Yet when Jehoiakim was taken away the people set his son, Jehoiachin, on the throne: but he could not stay there, for God had said he should not.

As soon as Nebuchadnezzar heard of his being king he sent an army against it. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old.* Though he only reigned three months, he had time to show his true character. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done. His father had committed abominations, and he did the same.

His mother encouraged him in sin. Her name was Ne-hush-ta. It might have been expected

* In Chronicles, Jehoiachin is said to be eight years old; but *that* is evidently a mistake of those who copied the Scriptures.

2 KINGS, XXIV. 15.
Jehoiachin led captive.—P. 361.

that she would be good, for her father, El-Nathan, was one of the three princes that had begged Jehoiakim not to burn the roll. But she was not like her father. She was ungodly. Jeremiah prophesied against her as well as against her son. He said to him, 'Thus said the Lord; I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and whose face thou fearest.'

Whom did he mean? Nebuchadnezzar.

'I will cast thee out, and thy MOTHER that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born, and there shall ye die.'

What country was that? Babylon.

This prophecy was soon fulfilled. The army came from Babylon and besieged Jerusalem.

The young king soon opened the gates and went out, and gave himself up to Nebuchadnezzar. Nor did he go out alone; his mother went with him, and his princes, and all his servants.

Nebuchadnezzar's army went into the city and seized all the treasures of the Lord's house, and of the king's house. They took captive all the chief people of Jerusalem, princes, soldiers, and workmen, such as carpenters and smiths. They left only very poor and helpless people.

All the captives were taken to Babylon. Amongst them was a great prophet, even Ezekiel. He it was who had likened Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim to two young lions.

These captives (the captives who went with Jehoiachin) are called the *second* captivity.

The first captivity had happened seven years before, during Jehoiakim's reign. Amongst those *first* captives was Daniel. He and his friends were now serving in the king's palace at Babylon. Ezekiel went with Jehoiachin in the second captivity. He was taken to a place on the river Chebar, more than a hundred miles from Babylon; so perhaps he never saw Daniel.

Jehoiachin was kept in prison at Babylon, and there he remained for many years. But before he died he was comforted, as you will hear, though he never returned to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

THE BASKETS OF FIGS.

(JER. XXIV.)

You are now going to hear of the last king of Judah. He was the twentieth king.

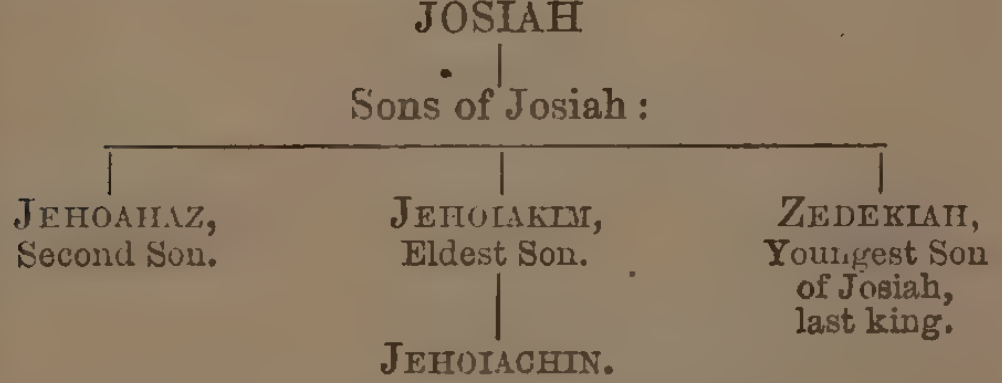
When Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon, he placed another king upon the throne of Jerusalem.

This king was named Zedekiah. He was the youngest son of Josiah.

You have heard of his two elder sons being kings, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim.

After them Jehoiakim's son had reigned for three months.

Zedekiah was uncle to that young king, Jehoiachin, for he was his father's brother.



Zedekiah was almost as young as his nephew. He was only twenty-one when he began to reign. He soon showed his true character. He resembled his elder brothers, for he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as they had done, but he was not like them in disposition.

Jehoiakim and Jehoahaz had been fierce like lions. Zedekiah was not so violent, but he was mean, deceitful, and cowardly.

He was ungrateful to the king of Babylon who had set him on the throne ; he broke his promise, and rebelled against him by refusing to pay him tribute.

He did not treat Jeremiah ill at first, as Jehoiakim had done. He did not put him in

prison; so that Jeremiah was able again to preach in the streets of the city. You shall hear one of Jeremiah's sermons.

Jeremiah told the people a vision that he had from the Lord. It was of two baskets of figs in the courts before the temple. As Jeremiah was a priest, he had often seen baskets of fruit brought to the temple to be offered up as sacrifice. It was one of the laws of Moses that people should bring their first ripe fruit to God, for the first ripe fruit is the best.

Jeremiah said, 'One of the baskets had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe, and the other basket had very bad figs; they could not be eaten, they were so bad. Then the Lord said unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? I said, Figs; the good figs very good; the bad figs very bad,—they cannot be eaten, they are so bad.

Why did the Lord show these baskets to Jeremiah? He soon told him.

The Lord said, 'The good figs are like the captives whom I have sent to Babylon for their GOOD.'

Are you surprised to hear that any of the captives were like good figs? It was the Lord who would make them good when they were in captivity.

The Lord said, 'I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, for they shall

return unto me with their whole heart.' Amongst these captives was young Jehoiachin, and this blessing was given to him. He repented in his prison, and at last he was comforted.

Who were the evil figs?

Zedekiah, and the people who were left in Jerusalem. They would not repent, and the Lord said, 'I will deliver them to be removed to all kingdoms for their HURT, and they shall be a curse wherever they go.'

Some people would remain, and they would die from the sword, or by famine and plague, in the land of Judah.

Would not the people be very angry to hear Jeremiah call them evil figs? Yes, but Jeremiah was a faithful prophet, and spoke all the Lord told him.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THE LETTER TO THE CAPTIVES,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxix. 1–15.)

THE Lord sent a message to the poor captives in Babylon. The Lord had promised to make them like good figs, and so He sent them a very gracious message.

How did He send the message?

Jeremiah wrote it in a letter. He did not take it to Babylon himself. Jeremiah had once made that long journey to hide the girdle in a rock, and again to dig it up out of its hiding-place.

But this time Jeremiah *sent* the letter.

He heard there were two chief men going to Babylon, and he asked them to take the letter. These two men were ambassadors from King Zedekiah to King Nebuchadnezzar: kings' messengers are often called 'ambassadors.'

Jeremiah's letter began with these words: 'Thus saith the Lord, Build houses, and dwell in them; plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; marry wives, and bring up your children.'

Why did God give them these commands?

Because He wanted them to give up the hope of coming back to Judah. There were many prophets who told them they were coming back; but these were false prophets.

God told the captives in his letter that they were not to believe those prophets. He said also, 'Pray for the peace of Babylon, that you may have peace.'

The letter contained a most gracious promise.

'When you have been seventy years in Babylon—I will cause you to return to this place.'

Very few would live so long, but then their children might come back.

The Lord ended the letter with this sweet encouragement: 'Ye shall go and pray unto me, and

I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me and find me; when ye shall search for me, with all your hearts.'

There was one captive in Babylon who remembered these words seventy years afterwards, and prayed to God to set His people free.

That captive was Daniel.

He was now quite a young man in Babylon, standing before the king. No doubt he heard this letter read.

Nebuchadnezzar was pleased with the prophets who told the captives to settle quietly in his land. If he read this letter he must have been pleased with Jeremiah.

He was very angry with two false prophets, named Ahab and Zedekiah, because they told the captives they should soon go back to Jerusalem. In his fury Nebuchadnezzar had them seized and roasted in the fire. This dreadful punishment made other false prophets afraid.

The captives often talked of these false prophets, and when they wanted wickedly to curse a man they would say, 'The Lord make thee like Ahab and Zedekiah, whom the King of Babylon roasted in the fire.'

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE WOODEN YOKES,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxvii. 1–16.*)

THE Lord often commanded Jeremiah to do very strange things. By doing these strange things Jeremiah led the people to attend to his words. Once he had worn an unwashed girdle to make them attend; another time, he had dashed down an earthen jar.

This time he was commanded to wear a wooden yoke, such as an ox wears when it draws a cart. He was to fasten it on with bonds, or straps. He was to make five other yokes with straps, besides his own yoke.

For whom were those other yokes? For five kings.

These were the five kings to whom the yokes were to be sent: the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. These countries lie

* Evidently a transcriber has by mistake inserted the name of Jehoiakim instead of that of Zedekiah in the first verse.

round about Canaan, three at the south and two at the north. Look for them in the map.

Who was to take these yokes to all these kings?

These kings had sent ambassadors or messengers to King Zedekiah.

Jeremiah gave the yokes to them, and told them to say to their masters, 'Thus saith the God of Israel, I have made the earth, and man and beast, by my great power; I have given your lands to Nebuchadnezzar, and I have given him the beasts of the field, and all nations shall serve him and his son, and his son's son,* until the *time* of his land come' (that is, the time for it to be conquered).

This was the message God sent to the kings. He commanded them all to serve the king of Babylon, and not to believe their dreamers and sorcerers, who said, 'Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon.'

We know that these kings did not obey the Lord's message; for if they had served the king of Babylon they would have been safe within their own lands, as the Lord had promised.

And did not Jeremiah speak to his own king?

Oh, yes; he came to him with the yoke upon his neck, and entreated him to serve the king of Babylon. He said, 'Why will you die, thou and

* Evil-Merodach was Nebuchadnezzar's son, and Belshazzar was his son's son. All nations served them, and then Babylon was conquered by the Medes and Persians.

thy people? Hearken not to the prophets who say, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon, for they prophesy a lie unto you.'

We know that King Zedekiah did not mind this message.

How much Jeremiah must have been mocked as he went about in his yoke! But he suffered all that he might please the Lord.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

HANANIAH, THE REBELLIOUS PROPHET,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxvii. 16 to end; xxviii.)

JEREMIAH wore his yoke when he delivered his message to the ambassadors. He wore his yoke when he spoke to the king.

Afterwards he went into the temple to speak to the priests and to the people, and he still wore his yoke, fastened with bonds or straps to his shoulders.

He said to the priests and to the people, Serve the king of Babylon and live.'

He spoke also about the golden vessels of the temple. There were false prophets, who deceived the people by saying that the vessels

that had been taken to Babylon would soon be brought back.

Jeremiah said, 'Do not believe those prophets, for they prophesy a lie unto you.'

There were many beautiful things still left in the temple. There were two splendid brass pillars, an immense brass basin (that once stood on the backs of twelve oxen*); and there were ten smaller basins upon stands, and many other vessels. All these the people valued much.

Jeremiah said from the Lord, 'Instead of any vessels returning from Babylon, all these vessels shall be taken to Babylon, and they shall not be brought back until the end of the seventy years, when God will bring *you* back.'

Most of the priests and people were angry with Jeremiah, but the false prophets were the most angry, because Jeremiah said that they spoke lies.

One of these false prophets was named Hananiah. He stood up to speak, and said, 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years will I bring again to this place all the vessels that have been taken away, and I will bring back Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah).'

Jeremiah then stood up and said to the whole

* This sea had been taken off the oxen by King Ahaz. 2 Kings, xvi. 17. The ten smaller lavers stood upon stands (called bases) on wheels, that they might be moved about.

assembly, 'Amen: the Lord do so, and bring again the vessels and the captives.'

Then he spoke very solemnly and awfully. He commanded all present to wait and see whose words would come true, whether his or Hananiah's.

The wicked prophet, seeing that the people took his part, went up to Jeremiah, and unfastened the straps that bound the yoke to his neck, and then broke the yoke, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord, Even so will I break the yoke of the king of Babylon from the necks of all nations in two years.'

What did Jeremiah reply? Nothing.

How did he revenge the insult that Hananiah had offered when he broke his yoke?

He did not revenge it at all, but quietly and meekly left the temple and went his way.

God soon spoke to him, and gave him a message for Hananiah.

'Thus saith the Lord, Thou hast broken the yoke of *wood*, but I have put a yoke of *iron* on all these nations, and they shall serve Nebuchadnezzar.'

Jeremiah went to Hananiah and delivered this message. He said also, 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will cast thee off from the face of the earth. This year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.'

Two months afterwards Hananiah died. So this wicked prophet got nothing by breaking

the yoke, any more than Jehoiakim did by burning the roll. No one ever got anything by resisting the Lord, instead of submitting to His punishments. When Jesus took upon Him our sins, how humbly He wore His Father's yoke and bore His Father's stripes!

CHAPTER CXL.

THE DROWNING OF THE ROLL,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. L. LI.)

JEREMIAH was commanded to prophesy against many heathen nations—Moab, Edom, Ammon, and many more.

The Lord was going to punish them all for their sins.

How would He punish them?

By sending against them Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Therefore God called Babylon His hammer, and His battle-axe, and His destroying mountain.

Why? Because God used that in destroying other wicked nations. But Babylon would at

last be herself destroyed. And why? Because she was wicked.

God called her, 'Thou most proud.'

She was proud of her idols, and proud of her victories, and proud of her city.

But the Lord said, 'The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire.'

Babylon was indeed a great city, with walls nearly four hundred feet high and nearly one hundred broad. Yet her high gates and broad walls were to come down.

Jeremiah wrote in a long roll all these prophecies against Babylon, just as he had once written on a roll his prophecies against Jerusalem. He was then in prison; now he was not in prison.

Who was to take this roll to Babylon? Jeremiah could not go there himself, for Zedekiah would not let him leave Jerusalem. But Jeremiah heard that one of his friends was going to Babylon. It was Baruch's brother. His name was Seraiah. He was a prince, while Baruch was only a prophet.

Seraiah was a quiet, peaceable prince.

Why was he going to Babylon?

He was going for Zedekiah, who wanted to send a message to Nebuchadnezzar.*

* See Jer. li. 59, 'When he went *with* Zedekiah;' '*with*' here means '*in behalf*.' Zedekiah had sent Seraiah on a message from him to Babylon.

Jeremiah asked Seraiah to take his roll with him to Babylon, and to read it by the river Euphrates. He told him other things that he wished Seraiah to do and say.

So Seraiah took the roll with him, and read them in Babylon by the river side. No doubt many people gathered round him to listen. Then Seraiah spoke thus to God, as Jeremiah had told him,—

'O Lord, Thou hast spoken against this place to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever.'

Seraiah did not ask God to save Babylon, for he knew from the roll that God had determined to destroy it.

Then Seraiah took a stone and bound it to the roll, to make it heavy, and he cast them both into the Euphrates, saying, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again, for the evil I will bring on her.'

It was right in him thus to drown the roll, though it was wrong of Jehoiakim to burn the other roll. Seraiah obeyed God when he destroyed the book.

The people in Babylon did not repent when they heard of the evils coming upon them.

CHAPTER CXLI.

THE TWO GREAT EAGLES,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(Ezek. xvii.)

It was the duty of Zedekiah to obey the king of Babylon, and to pay him tribute. But he would not.

Zedekiah had made a promise to Nebuchadnezzar that he would serve him; he had even sworn he would serve him, and written it down with his hand.

It is very wicked to break a promise. It is telling a lie.

Zedekiah sent to the king of Egypt to ask for help. He wanted to get horses and soldiers, that he might resist the king of Babylon if he should come against him.

There was a prophet in Babylon who knew all that Zedekiah was doing, for God told him. This prophet was Ezekiel. He had been taken captive with Jehoiachin. He taught the captives about God, as he sat by the river Chebar in Babylon. It was this prophet who had told the parable of the two young lions—Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. (It is to be found in Ezek. xix.)

This same prophet told another parable about the two last kings, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. This was the parable that Ezekiel told from the Lord:—

'A great eagle, with great wings, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch, and cropped off a young twig from the top, and carried it into a city of merchants' (merchants mean 'sellers').

Who was the great eagle?

The king of Babylon.

Who was the cedar of Lebanon?

The royal family of David.

Who was the young twig on the highest branch?

Jehoiachin, the young king of Judah.

Where did the eagle take him?

To Babylon, where there was buying and selling of all manner of goods.

Was that all the parable?

Oh, no; Ezekiel went on to say from the Lord,—

'The great eagle took of the seed of the land, and it grew and became a low vine, with many branches and leaves, and it turned its branches and roots towards the eagle.'

Who was the seed of the land?

One of the royal family, even Zedekiah, whom the king of Babylon made king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar might have made one of his own servants king; but he put a man of Judah on

the throne, and he made him promise with an *oath* to serve him, and pay money to him.

At first this little vine turned its branches towards the great eagle.

Soon there came another great eagle to the low vine, and then this vine turned towards the second eagle; it bent its roots towards him, and shot forth its branches towards this second eagle.

Who is the second great eagle?

Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Zedekiah turned towards Egypt, and asked for his help.

The Lord said He was very angry with Zedekiah for breaking his promise to Nebuchadnezzar. He said, 'Shall not that vine wither in all the leaves of her spring?'

God declared that He Himself would punish Zedekiah.

'I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, because of his sin which he hath committed against ME.'

Then the Lord made a very wonderful promise, —'I will take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and I will plant it. I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and, will plant it upon a high mountain.'

Who is this young twig?

Even Jesus the Lord.

He was a tender twig, even a little babe of the house of David, and He will be planted one

day as King on the highest mountain in the world, where Jerusalem will be built again. 'Then shall the Lord be King over all the earth.' (Zech. xiv.)

CHAPTER CXLII.

JEREMIAH'S FIRST CONVERSATION WITH ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxvii. 1–5; xxxiv. 1–11.)

THE time was now come for Zedekiah to suffer the punishment of his wickedness. One of his great sins was breaking his promise and his oath to the king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was very angry when he heard that Zedekiah had sent ambassadors to ask Pharaoh for men and horses to help him to rebel.

Great armies were soon seen gathering round Jerusalem. Many kings came with Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah might well be frightened at the sight of those great armies. His end was very near. He had reigned nine years. In less than two years he would be a captive and a prisoner. But he did not know this. He went on hoping he should be delivered.

He thought he would do something good to

please God, so he gave a command that his people should let their slaves go free; and he let his own go free.

God had commanded that no one should keep a Jew more than seven years as a slave.

When a Hebrew slave had served seven years, the master was bound to set him free (unless he wished to stay, and then his ears were bored by nailing them to the door for a moment). Most of the masters had kept their slaves too long, but now they were all frightened, and let their slaves go free.

Could Zedekiah get peace by doing this right thing?

No, he still felt that he had no God to go to, for he did not love God or wish to serve Him, though he was not so bold as Jehoiakim had been.

Another wicked thing he had not yet done; he had shut up Jeremiah in prison (as Jehoiakim had done); and so now in his trouble he sent two messengers to say to Jeremiah, 'Pray now unto the Lord our God for us.'

Jeremiah had been praying many, many years for this wicked people. He must have been glad to think that now Zedekiah wanted him to pray. But we do not know what answer he gave to the messengers.

Soon the Lord spoke to Jeremiah, saying, 'Go and speak to Zedekiah, king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and

he shall burn it with fire; and thou (Zedekiah) shalt surely be taken, and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak to thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon.'

How would Zedekiah like this message? But there was something pleasant that God added to the message.

Jeremiah was not in prison, so he could go and speak to Zedekiah. He went and saw the king. He gave his terrible message to the trembling monarch, and then he added these comfortable words,—

'O Zedekiah, king of Judah, thus saith the Lord of THEE, Thou shalt not die by the sword; thou shalt die in peace, and they shall burn odours (or sweet things) for thee, and they will lament, saying, Ah, lord!'

Did this last part of the message comfort Zedekiah?

No. He did not care for it,—he was so angry at the thought of going to Babylon. Yet he ought to have felt very thankful to hear he was to die in peace, for Jehoiakim had the burial of an ass; he ought to have felt very thankful to hear that his people would lament him, and say, 'Ah, lord!' for no one had lamented Jehoiakim. Zedekiah was unthankful; he had not done so wicked a thing as Jehoiakim did when he burned the roll, but still he was very wicked. He had not *yet* put Jeremiah in prison: but we shall see

whether he will *ever* do so. Unbelieving people get more and more wicked, and do things at last they would not do at first. Pray God, dear children, to take away from you a heart of unbelief.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

JEREMIAH IN THE KING'S PRISON,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxii. xxxiii.)

ZEDEKIAH was much offended by Jeremiah's message.

He said to the prophet, 'Why did you say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon?'

And then Zedekiah repeated the whole message, except the part about himself dying in peace—*that* part he left out.

After reproaching Jeremiah for his faithfulness to God, he shut him up in prison.

There was a prison in his own palace, and in that prison he made Jeremiah sleep at night, while he let him walk about the prison court in the day.

People could come to see him in the court.

One day the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'Your uncle's son is coming to ask you to buy a field.'

Soon afterwards Jeremiah saw his uncle's son enter the court. He was his cousin, and his name was Han-am-e-el.

He came up to Jeremiah, and said, 'Buy my field; for it is you who have the right to buy it; buy it for yourself.'

Then Jeremiah remembered that the Lord had told him all this beforehand, and he knew that it was the Lord's will that he should buy it.

There was a law given by Moses that if a person wished to sell a field, he must first ask his nearest relation to buy it.

At the end of every fifty years there was a feast called the jubilee; then the fields were given back to the people who sold them.

Jeremiah did not see any use in buying this field: he did not want a field while he was in prison, and he knew the city would soon be burned; but he obeyed God by buying the field. He paid seventeen shekels of silver, which is about two pounds of our money. This money was weighed in scales with weights.

Then Jeremiah wrote on two pieces of parchment to say that he had bought the field.

Afterwards he called Baruch, and gave these papers into his hands.

While Jeremiah was doing all this, a great many Jews were sitting all round the court, watching all that went on.

When he gave the papers to Baruch, he said, 'Put these papers in an earthen covered jar, where they will be kept safe for a long while.' Then he declared before all in the court, 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.'

After Jeremiah had done all this, he went to pray. He wanted to ask God why he was told to buy the field when the people of Babylon were going soon to destroy everything.

God answered his prayers, and said, 'Is there anything too hard for me? This city shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon: but afterwards I will gather my people from all countries. Fields shall be bought in this land of which you say, it is desolate, without man or beast. I will cause their captivity to return.'

The Lord said many glorious things about Jerusalem in the last days. The best of all his promises was:—

'I will pardon all their iniquities,' and 'I will cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David.'

Who is that Branch?

Jesus. He is like a branch or sceptre in the Father's hand, and he will come again and reign in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE ARMY OF BABYLON LEAVING JERUSALEM,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxvii. 5–11; xxxiv. 11 to end.)

AN event now happened that gave great joy to Jerusalem. It was the armies of Nebuchadnezzar going away.

Why did they go away? Because they heard that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was coming up to help Jerusalem. So they went to meet him and to destroy his armies.

Now there was joy for the false prophets. They boasted that their word was come true when they said no evil would happen. They mocked Jeremiah, and said he was a false prophet.

The people said to each other, 'The Chaldeans are gone away, and will never return.' You remember that the people of Babylon were often called Chaldeans.

Zedekiah wished to know what would happen, and he sent his servants to Jeremiah in his prison to ask him to inquire of his God.

This was Jeremiah's answer:—

'Thus saith the Lord, Behold Pharaoh's army, which is come to help you, shall go back to Egypt,

and the Chaldeans shall come again and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire! Deceive not yourselves by saying the Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart.'

Must not this message have made Zedekiah unhappy? but it did not make him repent. He still kept Jeremiah in prison.

Do you remember how the masters had set their Hebrew servants free?

They did this in their fright, when they thought that Babylon would conquer them. But when they saw that the armies were gone away, they were sorry they had set the servants free, and they sent and caught them and made them slaves again.

God was much displeased with this unfaithful conduct, and spoke to Jeremiah in the prison, and told him to say to the masters: 'You had done right in my sight by setting at liberty your Jewish slaves: but you turned and polluted my name by making them slaves again. You had made a covenant (or promise) that you would obey me, and you have broken your covenant.'

This was the punishment the Lord would send: He would give liberty to His servants to hurt the Jews. What servants? To His servants, 'The sword, the pestilence, and famine.' God called them His servants.

Jeremiah ended his message by these words: 'I will give the men who broke my covenant into

the hands of their enemies; and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven and the beasts of the earth; and Zedekiah and his princes will I give into the hands of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. Behold, I will cause them to return to this city, and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.'

In this dreadful message it was not said that Zedekiah's dead body should be food for birds and beasts: for he was to die in peace in Babylon. It was the masters who had taken back their Jewish slaves—it was *they* who were to be left unburied.

CHAPTER CXLV.

JEREMIAH IN JONATHAN'S PRISON,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxvii. 11–16.)

ZEDEKIAH hoped that the army from Babylon would never return to Jerusalem. He did not believe anything Jeremiah said: but he was no longer angry, so he released him from prison.

Then Jeremiah thought it would be best for

him to return to his own city. That city was Anathoth, only three miles from Jerusalem.

It was a city of the priests, and Jeremiah was a priest.

He had lately bought a field near Anathoth. It would be a pleasant change for him to walk among his own olives, and vines, and fig-trees, after being shut up in the king's prison.

He went out by a gate to the north. It was called the gate of Benjamin. Anathoth was in the tribe of Benjamin. There was a captain who kept that gate, and watched to see who came out. This captain saw Jeremiah coming out.

Who was this captain? His name was Irijah. You have never heard of him, but you have heard of his grandfather. His name was Hananiah—the man to whom Jeremiah had once said, 'This year thou shalt die.'

It is probable Irijah had a spite against Jeremiah after what had happened to his grandfather.

As soon as he saw him, he seized him, and said, 'You are going to join the Chaldeans.'

Jeremiah answered, 'No: I am not.'

How could he go to them, when they were far away? But if he *could*, he would not have turned from his own people to go to strangers.

Irijah would not listen to the sorrowful prophet. This proud young man led him back to Jerusalem, and brought him to the princes—the great lords who were angry with Jeremiah.

When these princes saw him they began to beat him and to abuse him. They said that he should not go back to the king's prison, where he could walk in the court, but that he should be put in a much worse place. They took him to a dreadful prison. It was in the house of a man named Jonathan. He was a scribe—one who wrote out the law of God and explained it to the people, but he did not follow it himself, for he was cruel and unmerciful. His prison was a deep dungeon; near the bottom there were holes in the sides, where men might lie in the dark and in the damp.

There poor Jeremiah lay day after day, with very little to eat, and no one to speak to, but God. He was used to speak to God, and to hear His word. And now he could pour out his soul to his God.

It is a great thing to have God to go to in distress.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

RETURN OF THE ARMY OF BABYLON TO JERUSALEM, IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxvii. 16 to end.)

JEREMIAH continued many days in the prison—lying in a narrow hole near the bottom. He must

have died in that close place had he stayed there long.

Soon an event happened which showed that he was a true prophet.

The army of the Chaldeans returned to Jerusalem and fought against it.

When the king saw his old enemies round the walls, he thought of Jeremiah, the faithful prophet. He soon heard where he was, and he sent for him to the palace.

What a relief it must have been to poor Jeremiah, being taken out of the prison, even for a little while.

The king wished no one to know that he sent for Jeremiah, so he must have sent at night.

Jeremiah was taken to the king's palace. There he was alone with the king.

Zedekiah asked him a question,

'Is there any word from the Lord?'

Jeremiah replied, 'There is. Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.'

This was what Jeremiah had always said: and now Zedekiah began to think that what he said was true.

Jeremiah took this opportunity to make a request for himself.

He began by saying, 'How have I offended thee, that thou hast put me in prison? Where are now the prophets who used to say, "The king of Babylon shall not come against you any more?" Therefore, hear now, O my lord the

king, and let my supplication be accepted, and don't let me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, because I shall die if I stay there.'

How piteous it was to see the prophet with his pale face, lifting up his thin hands to beg for mercy from the king!

Zedekiah was not a hard-hearted man, and he listened to the poor man's supplications. He desired his servants to place him in the court near the palace. That was the place where Jeremiah used to walk about, and where he used to talk to the people. Though the court was a prison, it was delightful compared with the dungeon in Jonathan's house.

The king thought that the poor prophet would want something to eat, and so he ordered that a piece of bread should be given every day to Jeremiah.

There was a street where the bakers lived, and Jeremiah was to have his bread from that street, till all the bread was gone.

Thus God answered the prayers of His prophet, and delivered him from darkness and from death.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE LORD'S MESSAGES TO THE KING, PEOPLE, AND PRINCES,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(Jer. xxi.)

While Jeremiah was walking about the court of the prison, two messengers from the king came up to him. One of them was a chief priest, named Zephaniah:* the other was named Pashur. He was not the Pashur who had put Jeremiah in prison a long while ago; but he was a bad man, like the other Pashur.

These two men came to Jeremiah with a request from king Zedekiah. It was, 'Do inquire of the Lord for us—for Nebuchadnezzar is fighting against us; and we want to know whether the Lord will do one of His wonderful works to make him go away.'

Perhaps Zedekiah when he sent the message, hoped that the Lord would do a great wonder for

* Zephaniah was uncle to the prophet Baruch, for Baruch was the son of Keriah, the son of Maaseiah. Zephaniah was the son of Maaseiah, and brother to Keriah.

him, as he did once for Hezekiah, when he struck dead one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians, who were fighting against him. But why should God do such a wonder for Zedekiah: for he was not at all like Hezekiah—that holy man—full of faith?

Jeremiah gave a very mournful answer to the messengers.

'Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back your weapons (such as swords and spears), and I MYSELF will fight against you; and I will smite the inhabitants, and they shall die of a great pestilence. Those who do not die of the pestilence, or of famine or sword, I will deliver them into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword.'

This was Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah.

He sent also a message to the people: 'Tell them that every one who remains in this city shall die by sword, or famine, or pestilence; but that he who goes out and gives himself up to the Chaldeans—he shall live.'

This was God's message to the people.

He sent another message to the princes—even to the royal family. They were all descended from king David. Many of these princes were standing round listening to Jeremiah.

The message to them was: 'Thus saith the Lord, O house of David, do judgment, and deliver poor people out of the hand of those who

ill-treat them, lest my fury go out like fire and burn that none can quench it.'

We see from this message that the princes were unjust and cruel to the poor, and let wicked people injure them and take away their things.

The princes and all the great lords were very angry with Jeremiah for rebuking their sins, and they wished they could get hold of him and kill him.

A long while afterwards Jesus was hated by great men, because He told them of their sins.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE WORST DUNGEON,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxviii. 1–6.)

THERE were many princes who heard Jeremiah's prophecy in the court of the prison. Some were very angry with the prophet. Four of these great men went straight to the king. Pashur, one of the messengers, was among those who went; but Zephaniah, the other messenger, went

not. He was Baruch's uncle, and probably a good man.

The four princes who went to the king said to him, 'We beseech thee to put Jeremiah to death: for he is persuading people not to fight against the king of Babylon.'

Zedekiah did not wish to have Jeremiah put to death, but he had not courage to stand up for him against the princes. He replied, 'Behold, Jeremiah is in your hand; though I am king, I can do nothing, but what you please.'

Whom does Zedekiah remind you of? Is it not of Pontius Pilate, who would not stand up for Jesus, though he thought He was good?

It is the duty of a king to command his people, and it is the duty of a parent to command his children, and it is the duty of a master to command his servants. It was Zedekiah's duty to command these princes. He ought to have said, 'I will not allow you to do such a wicked thing as to kill Jeremiah.' But Zedekiah was weak-minded and cowardly.

The four princes were glad to get Jeremiah into their hands to do what they liked with him. Cruel indeed was their treatment. They felt they could not torment him too much. They did not want to kill him with the sword, but they put him where he would certainly die soon.

There was a dungeon in the court — worse than Jonathan's dungeon. It belonged, we believe, to one of the king's sons, named Malchiah. The

prince Malchiah was very young to have a dungeon, but boys are often very cruel.*

This dungeon was so very deep, it was necessary to use ropes to put Jeremiah in. How the ropes must have hurt his half-starved body! At the bottom there was mire—deep mire. How dark it must have been—how loathsome and disgusting! There was no cabin or niche at the side (as in Jonathan's prison) for the prophet to lie in. There was no water for him to quench his thirst in that close place. He sank in the mire. He must soon die, if he remain there.

Was he not like Jesus, who, sinking in the mire of our sins, cried out, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

Jeremiah wondered why God let him be put in such a horrible place.†

* The dungeon is said to belong to Malchiah, the son of Hammeleech. That last word means '*of the king*.'—Jer. xxxviii. 6.

† See Lam. ii. 1–20.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE MERCIFUL SERVANT,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxviii. 7–13.)

THE princes put a stone on the top of the horrible dungeon.*

Now Jeremiah was quite in the dark; neither could his cries be heard by those in the court. He felt he must soon die. Then he called upon God, and said, 'I am cut off.'

The Lord answered, 'Fear not.'

Jeremiah's being let down into such a horrible dungeon was much talked about. There was a man in the king's palace who loved Jeremiah. He heard of his cruel treatment by the princes. This man was no prince, but a slave. His name was Ebed-melech, which means 'Slave of the king.' He was not a Jew, but one of the despised Africans. The place he came from was Ethiopia, so he had a black skin, but his heart was full of love and mercy, and he could not bear to think that Jeremiah was being so ill-treated. He must

* Lam. iii. 53.

have been one of God's children, for he loved Jeremiah as a brother.

He longed to deliver Jeremiah from the pit. He knew that the king, his master, did not hate the prophet, and that it was those princes who had done the wicked deed of putting him in the dungeon.

The king was now sitting in the gate of Benjamin as a judge. Ebed-melech went straight to the judgment-seat. He spoke to the king, saying, 'These men have done evil to Jeremiah the prophet; they have cast him into the dungeon, and he is like to die of hunger, for there is no more bread in the city.'

Whom did he mean by '*These men?*'

He meant 'The princes.'

He was not afraid of them because they were great men, but spoke of them as they deserved.

When he said there was no bread in the city, he meant that there was none to be bought, for there was still bread in the king's palace.

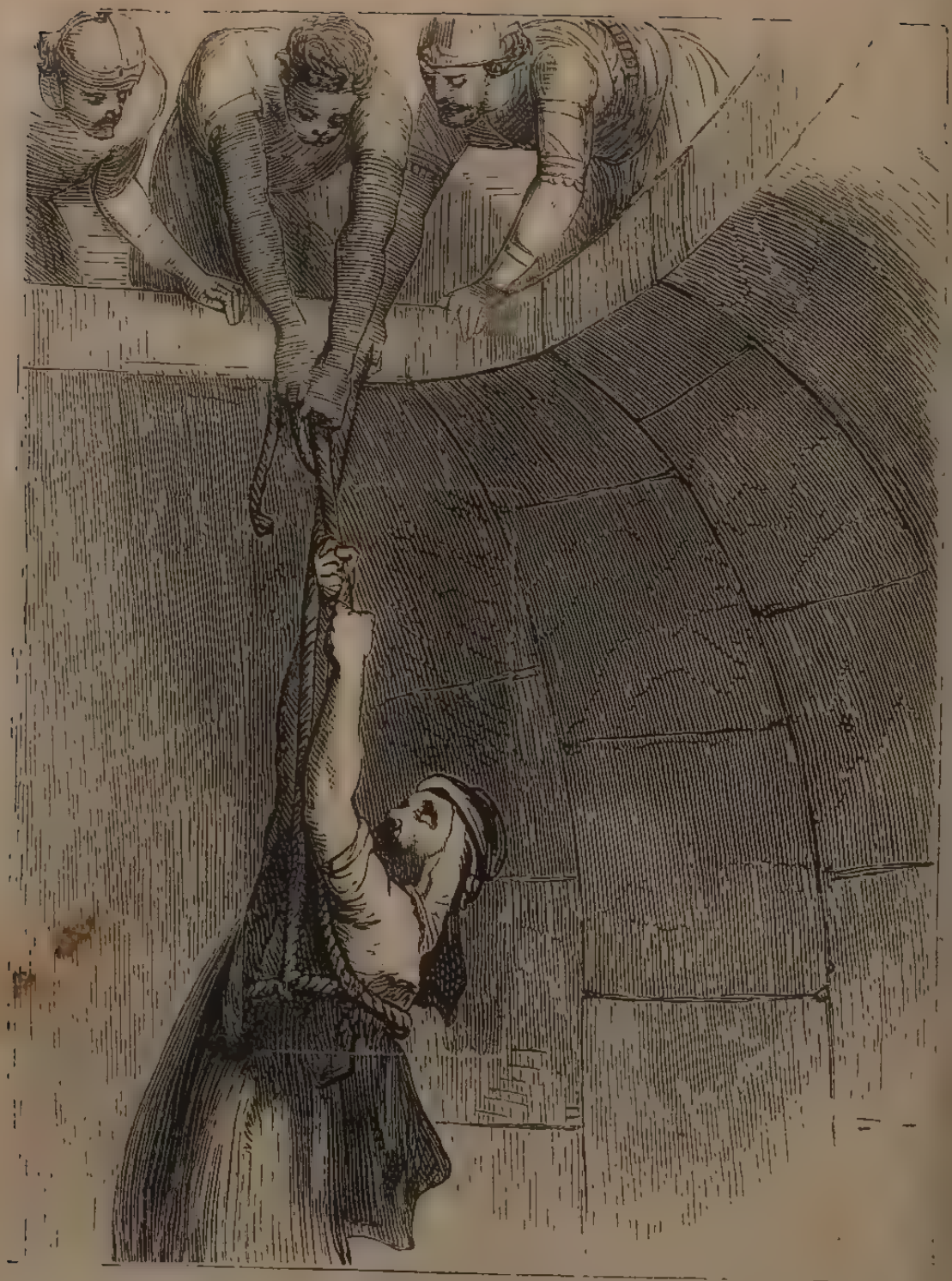
The king granted Ebed-melech's request, and desired him to take thirty men with him, and to make haste lest Jeremiah should die.

What was the use of taking thirty men? could not three or four draw the prophet up?

Can you think why thirty were wanted?

As a guard against the princes and all the prophet's enemies.

Those princes would be ready to hinder Ebed-melech from drawing up the prophet, therefore



JER. XXXVIII. 13.
Ebed-melech raising Jeremiah out of the dungeon.—P. 399.

it was necessary to have thirty men to defend Jeremiah.

Ebed-melech returned to the palace with thirty men. He went first to a store-room where clothes were kept. The king had often wanted garments to lend his guests when he gave feasts in past days. There were some old rags in the store-room to mend the garments with, or to bind up wounds. Ebed-melech took a great bundle of rags with him, and went to the dungeon. He tied two little bundles of rags to the ends of some cords, and let them down to Jeremiah, and he called out to him, 'Put these old clothes and rotten rags under thy armholes under the cords.'

Why? To prevent the rough cords hurting the poor thin body of the prophet. He must have been hurt by the ropes when the cruel men had let him down. But Ebed-melech had a tender heart, and thought of every little thing to comfort Jeremiah.

The men drew up the poor prisoner into the court. We are not told what these thirty men did *first* for Jeremiah, but we may be sure that the merciful slave did not forget to wash the prophet from the mire, to clothe him with comfortable garments, or to give him the best food that could be got.

Now Jeremiah walked about the court of the prison, and was never again put into the dungeon.

See what good may be done by a slave who fears the Lord.

CHAPTER CL.

THE SECRET MEETING OF JEREMIAH AND ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxviii. 15 to end.)

JEREMIAH had been delivered from great misery. The king had saved his life through the kindness of the slave.

Soon he received a message from the king. It was to meet him in a place by the temple. There was a covered way leading from the palace to the temple. It may have been in this covered way that the prophet saw the king.*

The place of meeting was a secret one, for the king desired that no one should know that he talked with Jeremiah. He was afraid of the princes being displeased with him, if they knew that he felt respect for the poor prophet.

It is probable that the meeting was at night, but we are not certain of this.

The king spoke in a low voice that no one might overhear him. His words were, 'I will ask thee something, do not hide it from me.'

Jeremiah said that the king must first promise two things:—that he would not have him put to

* The word 'third' is called in the margin 'chief;' so it may have been the '*royal*' entry which is meant.

death, and that he would follow the advice he was going to give him.

Zedekiah swore a solemn oath that he would grant one of his requests, 'As the Lord liveth, that made our souls, I will not put thee to death, or give thee to the men who seek thy life.' But the king did not promise to grant the prophet's other request—to follow his advice.

Yet Jeremiah gave him advice. He said, 'If thou wilt go out and give thyself up to the princes of Babylon, thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire;—but if thou wilt NOT go to them, then shall this city be burned with fire, and thou shalt not escape.'

What plain advice this was!

Yet Zedekiah would not take it.

And why not? Because he was afraid of being laughed at by some Jews, who had already gone over to the king of Babylon.

'I am afraid,' said Zedekiah, 'lest the princes of Babylon should give me up to those Jews, and lest those Jews should mock me.'

Jeremiah replied, 'They shall NOT deliver thee to those Jews. I beseech thee to obey the voice of the Lord; so shall it be well with thee, and thou shalt live. But if thou refuse to go forth,—the princes of Babylon shall bring thy wives out of thy house, and they shall laugh at thee and say, "Thy friends have set thee on, and have made thee do what *they* would, and now thy feet are sunk in the mire, and thy friends have turned back." In

this way thou shalt be mocked, and thou thyself shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon, and THOU shalt CAUSE this city to be burned with fire.'

But Jeremiah could not persuade the king to follow his advice, though it was from the Lord.

One thing Zedekiah wanted — was — to keep secret his having talked to Jeremiah, and he charged him not to let the princes know of it.

He said, 'If they find out that we have talked together, and ask you what it was about, tell them that you asked me not to let you return to Jonathan's house, to die there.'

It was true that Jeremiah had talked about this with the king. Would it be wrong of Jeremiah to give this answer to the princes? No, for the princes had no right to ask him the question. A child is bound to tell the *whole* truth to his parents and teachers, but Jeremiah need not tell *everything* to the princes.

They *did* find out that Jeremiah and the king had talked together, and they wanted Jeremiah to tell them what it was about. But he told them only what the king had commanded him to say. That answer satisfied the princes, and they said no more.

What a weak mind Zedekiah had—to care so much about being mocked! How unbelieving he was as well as weak!

It is far better to be mocked in *this* world than in the next. We may be sure that devils will

mock the sinners they have deceived and destroyed. *Their* mocking will be terrible. Even God Himself will mock the wicked, for He has said, 'I will mock when your fear cometh' (Prov. i. 27).

CHAPTER CLI.

A GRACIOUS PROMISE,

IN THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(JER. xxxix. 15 to end.)

How much grieved Jeremiah felt for the obstinacy of Zedekiah! But something happened to cheer his heart. God gave him a message for Ebed-melech.

It must be a good message to that good man. It was to tell him that when the city was taken the Lord would deliver him. These were the words: 'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, I will bring my words upon this city for *evil* and not for *good*, and they shall be fulfilled in *that day* before thee. But I will deliver THEE in that day, and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For *I* will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee, because thou hast put thy trust in ME,' saith the Lord.

Now, we see why Ebed-melech was so kind and merciful, and why he loved the prophet so much. It was because he trusted in the Lord. Though born a heathen, he had turned from idols to serve the living God. He served Him by doing what was good in His sight.

You know well that when the Lord comes in His glory, he will say to His sheep, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom. . . . . For I was an hungered and ye gave me food. I was thirsty and ye gave me drink. I was in prison and ye came unto me.'

All these things Ebed-melech had done for Jeremiah when he was perishing in the dungeon, and he had done all—from FAITH, because he believed in God and trusted in His name. And he was to be delivered from death when the enemies rushed in, and from the second death for ever and ever.

Are you not reminded by his history of Rahab, who hid Joshua's messengers, and was delivered when Jericho was taken? That was the *first* city taken by the Israelites, and now their own greatest city was soon to be taken. In each of those two cities there was a message of peace to one person. For the Lord delivers the godly out of afflictions. And He will deliver *you*, my child, in the day of His wrath, if you now put your trust in Jesus, and seek to please Him, because you love him.

CHAPTER CLII.

THE RUIN OF ZEDEKIAH.

(Jer. lii. 5–24; xxxix. 10–15; xl. 1–5.)

At last the terrible moment, so long expected, arrived. One night a part of the wall was broken down, and through this place the men of Babylon rushed in, and filled the streets of Jerusalem. This terrible event happened in the hours of darkness.

O what confusion there was! what screams of terror! what running through narrow ways! what stumbling and falling of the weak! what trampling on dead bodies! and what slaughter of living men! The Jewish soldiers ran away along a secret path between two walls near the king's garden. Numbers, however, were slain, and many were taken prisoners.

The princes of Babylon came in and sat down in the chief gate of the city, where Jewish judges used to sit. Their names were strange, too hard to remember; one name was easy,—Rab-mag.

Nebuchadnezzar was not there; he was in a

city about a hundred miles off to the north, called Riblah.

What must Zedekiah have felt now his time was really come! His chief thought was about his things. He wished to save as much as he could.*

So he spent the day in getting his things together and packing up, while his servants made a hole in the wall of his palace. He must have done all this in a secret part of the palace where the enemies could not find him.

In the evening, when it was dark, he crept through the hole with the bundle on his back; he had covered his face with a cloth in such a way that he could not see the ground, though he could see his way. He had done this—that those who had seen his face before—might not know him again. His wives and his boys went with him; his daughters were not with him,—they remained in Jerusalem.†

The king and his family got out of the gate of Jerusalem, and ran along the plain leading to Jericho. Many soldiers followed the king.

Some one had seen the king go out, and told the enemies. So the men of Babylon pursued him and overtook him, and carried him to Riblah. They took also his wives and his sons.

As Zedekiah was hurried along that night, did

* Ezek. xii.

† See Jeremiah, xli. 10, where the king's daughters are spoken of.

he not wish that he had minded Jeremiah's words, and given himself up to Nebuchadnezzar some time ago?

But now it was too late. Now he could not expect to receive mercy from his conqueror.

Where was he taken by the soldiers? Not to Babylon at this time. He was taken to Riblah, a town on the way.

Nebuchadnezzar was at Riblah, in the midst of his camp and his soldiers.

Now the words of God by Jeremiah came to pass. These words were spoken by Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in his palace, two years before.

'Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee, mouth to mouth.'

It was dreadful for Zedekiah to look at those fierce and angry eyes, and to hear the terrible voice of his mouth.

Zedekiah had to stand before Nebuchadnezzar to be judged.

His judge accused him of breaking his promise by rebelling against him, when he had sworn by God that he would faithfully serve him.

What could Zedekiah answer? He knew that he was guilty, and could expect no mercy. How he must have trembled in that hour!

A dreadful punishment was pronounced by the angry monarch upon the trembling prisoner.

Not death—but something worse than death.

His little sons were to be killed before his eyes.

We know not their names, nor their ages. They might perhaps be twelve or fourteen years of age. Perhaps they were still younger. What awful pangs the father must have felt, when a soldier, with a sword, cut off each of those young heads!

Nor were theirs the only noble heads that fell to the ground that day, for a number of princes of Judah were slain at the same time.

This slaughter was the last sight that Zedekiah beheld, for, immediately afterwards, his eyes were put out by the cruel order of the king of Babylon.

The next command was to bind Zedekiah in chains. In these chains he was to be carried to Babylon: the chains were of brass. They were fastened round his feet, that he might never run away again. This was the state in which he entered the great city of Babylon—a blind prisoner, bereft of his sons, and of his throne.

Did he remember at this time the words of Jeremiah—'Thou shalt go to Babylon?' Jer. xxxiv. 4. Did he remember the words spoken in his palace, 'Thou shalt surely be taken and delivered into his hand?' (That is, Nebuchadnezzar's.)

In Babylon there was no abode for Zedekiah but a prison. In that prison he had time to think over his sad history. Happy was it for him, if he felt that he had brought on his own misery by his disobedience and obstinacy.

It may be that he was lodged in the same prison as his nephew, Jehoiachin. Eleven years ago Jehoiachin had been taken to Babylon in his youth. He was now nearly thirty. There is great reason to hope that Jehoiachin turned to the Lord in his prison, for we shall find that there was comfort prepared for him in his old age.

There was comfort also prepared for Zedekiah; Jeremiah had added to his sorrowful message, two years ago, these words—'Thou shalt die in peace.'

We know there is no peace for the wicked; but there is peace for the penitent. So as Zedekiah was to die in peace, he must die with a broken and contrite heart.

Did he enjoy sweet discourse with his nephew in the prison? Did they talk together of the crown they had lost, and of a better crown that they might obtain from the pardoning mercy of God?

It is possible that the aged Daniel may have visited and instructed them. He was a near relation of theirs, at least, a cousin. These things we cannot tell. But it is pleasant to think of imprisoned kings being cheered by hopes of glory.

Some of whom we read have been thus cheered —our own Charles and Louis of France. Those are the happiest kings who are brought to God, even if they die in a prison, as Zedekiah did.

We know not when Zedekiah died; but this we do know, that his death was lamented by his people in Babylon.

His people burned sweet odours for him, and mourned, saying, 'Ah! Lord.' They showed great love by thus bemoaning him after he had lost his kingdom.

Zedekiah must have been kind to his people. No one had thus lamented his brother Jehoiakim. No one had said for him, 'Ah! brother; ah! Lord;' or 'Ah! his glory.' He had been buried like an ass, without love or honour. Not so Zedekiah. There was hope in his end.

CHAPTER CLIII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

(Jer. lii. 12–16; xl. 1–6.)

We have heard of the captive king going to Babylon.

We now turn our eyes to Jerusalem.

What became of the conquered city?

A month after the king had escaped out of

the gates in the darkness—a very great man returned to the city.

He was the chief captain of Nebuchadnezzar, and was named Nebuzar-adan. This man was over the whole army, and he had a great work for them to do. It was—to destroy Jerusalem.

Nebuchadnezzar wished to destroy it, that it might never rebel any more, and God chose to destroy it as a punishment for the sins of five hundred years,—from Solomon to Zedekiah.

The captain began by setting on fire the Lord's house—the magnificent temple: then the king's house, and the houses of all the great lords, and the houses of all the people.

Afterwards the army broke down the walls of Jerusalem. It required their great strength to break down such walls.

There were many treasures of gold and silver found in the house of the Lord. There were a great number of cups and basins, candlesticks and shovels made of silver and gold; there were two high pillars of brass, an immense vessel of brass to contain water, and twelve oxen of brass on which the great vessel stood; all these were broken in pieces by the soldiers, and were all sent to Babylon; and with them many fine things out of the king's house.

Thus was fulfilled what Jeremiah had said ten years ago about these treasures—

'They shall be carried to Babylon.'

He had added this promise from the Lord,—

'*There* shall they be until the day that I visit them; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.' Jer. xxvii. 22.

When these treasures were to be carried to Babylon a number of poor Jews were to go with them.

There were two men who were certain that no evil would happen to them, because they each had a particular promise from God.

One of these men was Ebed-melech, the slave. You do not forget the promise that Jeremiah had given him from God. It was—that he should not fall into the hands of the soldiers of Babylon, and that he should not be killed by any sword.

This promise was fulfilled in this time of terror, and Ebed-melech was kept in safety, and preserved from the enemies. We know not where he spent the rest of his life, but we are sure that he lived in peace, and died in peace. This blessing was partly a reward for his kindness to Jeremiah in the dungeon, but chiefly it was the reward of faith. The Lord had said, 'Thou hast put thy trust in me.'

There was another man who knew the Lord would keep him from destruction

This was Jeremiah.

When he first became a prophet, the Lord had promised, 'I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked.' (Jer. xv. 20, 21.)

Nebuchadnezzar had heard how he had tried to

persuade the king to submit, and he was pleased with him for this. So when he sent his captain to Jerusalem, he said to him, 'Take Jeremiah, and look well to him, and do him no harm, but do to him whatever he wishes.' When the captain came to Jerusalem, he told the princes of Babylon about Jeremiah; and Rab-Mag and the other princes and the captain sent men to the court of the prison to set him free. They meant that he should now go where he liked.

The captain determined to take a great many Jews to Babylon. He chose out many rich and honourable men (though now poor and despised). Amongst them were the two chief priests and three door-keepers of the temple, and seven of Zedekiah's own attendants, who used to wait on him; and others who had resisted the king of Babylon. These were all brought to Riblah, and judged there, as Zedekiah had been. These great men were all condemned to death and slain at Riblah. Thus the chief rebels who had contended so long with Jeremiah met their deserved punishment.

A great many other Jews were taken in chains to Babylon. Some had their lives spared, because they had not stood up against Nebuchadnezzar, or because they had gone over to him before the city was conquered.

Jeremiah set out to go with these poor captives to Babylon. When he had gone a little way, the captain saw him, and spoke to him

kindly. This captain knew that the Lord was angry with the Jews on account of their sins. He had heard of the prophecies of Jeremiah, and he believed they were true. He said to the poor chained prophet, 'I loose thee this day from the chains upon thy hand. If thou wouldst like to come with me to Babylon, COME, and I will look well unto thee; but if not — stay. Wherever it seem good for thee to go—there go.' Then the captain gave him some food, as well as a reward, and let him go?

And did Jeremiah wish to go to Babylon?

No, he liked better to stay with the Lord's people.

If he had gone to Babylon he might have become a rich and honourable man, for the captain had said, 'I will look well to thee.' But Jeremiah preferred suffering affliction with his brethren to all the riches and honours of Babylon.

The captain left a great many poor people in the land, and he gave them gardens, fields, and vineyards. With them Jeremiah could live in poverty and humility. Nebuchadnezzar had appointed a *governor* to rule over these people (but not a *king*). The governor was not a prince of Babylon, but a Jew. This was a great mercy to the poor people. Jeremiah lived amongst them many years as their faithful prophet.

Great was his grief in looking at the forsaken fields and the ruined cities; and as he looked—he wept. He cried out, 'Mine eyes do fail with

tears. Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people, and mine eye trickleth down and ceaseth not.'

He knew it was for sin that the Lord had punished His people. He confessed this, saying, 'Jerusalem hath grievously sinned.'

During five hundred years (from Solomon to Zedekiah) Jerusalem worshipped idols.

Her punishment has lasted twenty-five hundred years.

But it will not last for ever; for the Lord will not cast off for ever,—but though He cause grief, yet He will have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.

He who once reigned in a cloud over Israel in the wilderness, will come again with clouds to reign for ever and ever.

Meanwhile He once appeared on earth in flesh.

Wise men from the East cried, 'Where is He, that is born King of the Jews?'

Little children knew Him, and sang, 'Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

The heathen governor wrote on His cross, 'The King of the Jews.'

But the Jews rejected Him, with yells exclaiming, 'We will have no king but Cæsar.'

When He comes again every tongue shall confess that He is Lord—and God His Father will say to Him, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.'

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